

THE AFTERMATH OF THE MARIA HERTOGH RIOTS IN COLONIAL SINGAPORE (1950-1953)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the genesis, outbreak and far-reaching effects of the first among a series of incidents of mass violence which determined the course of British colonial rule in post World War Two Singapore. I argue that the Maria Hertogh riots stemmed from British failure to address four crucial factors which shaped the Singapore Muslim community's attitudes towards the colonial regime: the influence of radical ideas, the effects of socio-economic marginalisation, press sensationalisation of the legal controversy, and the ineffectiveness of the police force. The outbreak of the riots had a negative effect on the image and role of the British colonial administration in Singapore, which jeopardised diplomatic ties between the British Empire, The Netherlands and the Muslim World. In response, the British utilised a symbiotic combination of proscription, surveillance, self-criticism, reconciliation and reform. Through these strategies, they sought to redeem their tarnished image, mitigate the negative effects of the riots, and anticipate similar outbreaks arising from racial and religious dissent. The politics, resistance, collaboration and ramifications upon minorities in Singapore arising from each of these five strategies will be brought to the fore.

This thesis contributes to the wider history of colonial Southeast Asia by initiating a shift beyond the study of the causes of riots towards an examination of the wide-ranging effects and crises faced in the aftermath. Secondly, it will illuminate the linkages between the British colonial administration in Singapore and policymakers and officials in the Home Government and other outlying colonies. Thirdly, a more nuanced

understanding of British management of mass violence in Southeast Asia will be provided. Fourthly, it proposes new ways of analysing forms of resistance that were employed by Southeast Asian communities in confronting colonial rule. Last of all, this study extends and refines the corpus of literature pertaining to religious minorities in colonial Southeast Asia.

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Needless to say, I am responsible for any errors in this work.

ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| A | Australia (Archival Record Code) |
| Advisory Committee | Established during the Malayan Emergency, the committee's role was to consider the appeals of those who had been arrested by colonial administration and pass decisions on the validity of the appeals. |
| API | <i>Angkatan Pemuda Insaf</i> (Group of Awakened Youths) |
| CAB | Records of the British Cabinet Office |
| CID | Criminal Investigation Department |
| CO | Colonial Office |
| CT | Communist Terrorist |
| <i>Fatwa</i> | An Arabic word for 'legal judgement' or an explanation given by a Muslim scholar on matters pertaining to the understanding and practise of Islam. |
| FO | Foreign Office |
| <i>Imam</i> | An Arabic word for 'leader'. It was used by the Malays to describe the leader of a prayer congregation or commander of a Muslim army. |
| IRO | Inter-Religious Organisation |
| ISEAS | Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore |
| <i>Jamiyah</i> | All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society |
| <i>JMBRAS</i> | <i>Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i> |
| <i>Kampong</i> | A Malay word for 'village' or 'a cluster of settlements' that was smaller than a town. |

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| <i>Kathi</i> | Also spelled as <i>Qadi</i> which means a Muslim judge. In Malaya, the <i>kathis</i> were entrusted with the registration of marriages and also arbitration of marital disputes. |
| Legislative Council | Consisted of twenty-two persons whose main function was to assist the Governor in the passing of laws of Singapore. The Governor however had veto powers over the Council. A majority of the Council's members were nominated by the British. In 1948, there were only six elected members. The number of elected members was increased to nine in 1951. |
| <i>Lex Domicili</i> | The law of the place of a person's domicile |
| <i>Locus standi</i> | Recognised position or acknowledged right to a given issue. In the realm of law, it refers to a plaintiff who has reasons to be a party to a legal case. |
| <i>Madrasah</i> | Islamic school |
| <i>Maulana</i> | An Arabic word for 'our lord' or 'our master'. It was commonly used in South and Southeast Asia as a title for a respected Muslim scholar. |
| MCP | Malayan Communist Party |
| MNP | Malayan Nationalist Party (also known as the <i>Pergerakan Kebangsaan Malaya Merdeka</i> [PKMM, or the Malayan National Independence Movement]) |
| MRLA | Malayan Races Liberation Army |
| <i>Mufti</i> | A Muslim scholar who interprets Islamic laws. |
| NACPM | National Archives, College Park, Maryland at the United States of America |
| NAS | National Archives of Singapore |
| <i>Nikah Gantung</i> | A truncated marriage or a marriage that was deemed by Malays in the post-war period as valid from the perspective of Islam but incomplete for the reason that the customary rites had not been performed. |
| <i>Parang</i> | A large knife that was used by Malays to cut through thick vegetation and also for self-defence as well as violent crimes. |

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| PERAM | <i>Pemuda Radikal Melayu</i> (Radical Malay Youths) |
| PKM | <i>Panitia Kemerdekaan Malaya</i> (or the Committee for Malayan Independence) |
| PREM | Records of the British Prime Minister's Office. |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| RG | Records Group. These are files that are deposited in the Washington Archives in the United States of America. |
| Special Branch | A unit within the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Singapore Police Force. Its main function was to acquire information to protect the public and the colonial state from subversive and extremist activities. |
| <i>Syariah</i> | Islamic Law (Malay spelling) |
| <i>Ulama</i> | Muslim scholars |
| UMNO | United Malays National Organisation |
| Whitehall | A road in London where the Colonial and Foreign Offices were located; shorthand for the British government |

— DRAMATIS PERSONAE —

Abdul Aleem Siddiqui (Maulana) - Founder of the All-Malaya Missionary Society and Muslim Preacher

Abdul Rahman (Tunku) - Second President of the United Malay Nationalists Organisation (UMNO), 1951-1971

Ahmad Ibrahim - Social activist, lawyer, legislative council member

Al-Attas, Syed Ali - Arab businessman and a member of the Malay Welfare Council

Alsagoff, Syed Ibrahim bin Omar – Arab second President of the All-Malaya Missionary Society, 1932-1964 and Chairman of the Muslim Advisory Board

Atlee, Clement - British Prime Minister, 1945-1951

Baines, Henry Wolfe - Bishop of Singapore, Anglican Church, 1949-1961

Bashir Mallal - Lawyer and Secretary of the Muslim League of Singapore

Blythe, Wilfred L. - Singapore Colonial Secretary, 1950-1953

Brown, T.A. - Singapore High Court Judge

Burhanuddin Al-Helmy - Co-founder of the Malay Nationalist Party and Editor of *Melayu Raya*

Che Aminah binte Mohamed - Maria Hertogh's foster mother

Che Zaharah bte Noor Mohamed - President of the *Kesatuan Kebajikan Perempuan Islam* (the Singapore Malay Women's Welfare Association)

Churchill, Winston - British Prime Minister, 1951-1955

Darus Shariff - Secretary of the Singapore Malay Welfare Council

Gimson, Franklin C. - Singapore Governor, 1946-1952

Goode, William - Singapore Colonial Secretary, 1953-1957

Haji Ali bin Haji Mohd Said - Chief *Kathi* of Singapore, 1948 - 1958

Han Hoe Lim - Medical Practitioner and Member of Executive Council

Greer, Robert - Minister, Presbyterian Church in Singapore

Griffiths, James - Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1950-1952

Gurney, Henry - British High Commissioner for Malaya

Hertogh, Adrianus - Maria Hertogh's natural father

Hertogh, Adeline - Maria Hertogh's natural mother

Higham, John D. - Assistant Secretary, Head of Eastern Department and Southeast Asian Department, Colonial Office, 1949-1953

Karim Ghani (Abdul Mohammed Abdul Karim Ghani) - Publisher, political activist and President of the Muslim League of Singapore

Langdon, William A. - American Consul-General based in Singapore

Laycock, John C. - Legislative Council member and founder of the Progressive Party

Leach, Lionel - Chairman of the Commission of Enquiry

Lee Kuan Yew - Lawyer, Founder of the Peoples' Action Party and later first Prime Minister of Singapore, 1959-1990

Lloyd, Thomas - Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office, 1947-1956

Locke, Arthur - Administrative Officer (East), based in Trengganu, Malaya.

M.A. Majid - President of the Muslim Welfare Association

Macdonald, Malcolm - United Kingdom Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, based in Singapore, 1948-1955

Mansoor Adabi - Malay-Muslim Husband of Maria Hertogh, trainee teacher and social activist

Maria Hertogh - also known as Nadra binte Ma'arof, daughter of Adrianus and Adeline Hertogh who was brought up as a Muslim.

Marshall, David Saul - Lawyer, Member of the Singapore Progressive Party and later first Chief Minister of Singapore, 1955-1956

McIntyre, L.R. - Acting Australian Commissioner for Malaya

Mohamed Javad [M.J.] Namazie - Joint Secretary of the Muslim Advisory Board

Mohamed Mustaza - President of the *Pemuda Radikal Melayu* (or PERAM, the Radical Malay Youths)

Montgomery, Bernard Law - Field Marshall of the British Army

Morris, Nigel - Singapore Commissioner of Police, 1952-1957

Nazir Mallal - Lawyer for Mansoor Adabi and the Melayu Raya Press

Nicoll, John F. - Singapore Governor, 1952-1956

Onn bin Jaafar - First President of United Malay Nationalists Organisation (UMNO), 1946-1951

Paglar, Charles Joseph - Medical Practitioner and legislative council member

Pennefather-Evans, John P. - Singapore Commissioner of Police, 1951-1952

Onraet, Rene - Police Adviser to the Malayan Special Branch

Sardon Jubir - Lawyer, social activist and legislative council member

Shinwell, Emmanuel - British Minister of Defense, 1950-1951

Syed Abdullah bin Yahya - President of the Arab Union

Tan Cheng Lock - President of the Malayan Chinese Association

Templer, Gerald - High Commissioner of Malaya, 1952-1954

Van Der Gaag, Jacob - Dutch Acting Consul General in Singapore

Wiltshire, R.C.B. - Acting Singapore Commissioner of Police, 1950-1951

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

To understand Malaya, study our recent riots. They were a great uprising of Malays against the centuries of British arrogance. No one led the rioters. No one told them what to do. They simply went out and killed all the white people they could find.

Abdul Samad bin Ismail¹

On 11th December, 1950, John W. Davies was travelling on a bus along the streets of modern Singapore with his wife and eight-year-old daughter. What seemed to be a calm evening was disrupted by a confrontation with rioters who were infuriated by a British court's decision that a Muslim girl named Maria Hertogh was to be restored to her Christian parents. Europeans in the colony were thus perceived as enemies of Islam. Davies was dragged out of the bus and assaulted by the roadside. In desperation, he jumped into a drain attempting to hide, but in vain. The rioters prevailed upon him and a barrage of vicious attacks soon followed. While the serviceman's wife and daughter were left unscathed in the course of mass violence that spread rapidly in other parts of Singapore, Davies was among many who had been mortally wounded. He died two days later.

Since that fateful incident, what has come to be known as the Maria Hertogh controversy has occupied a vital place within the Singapore government's depiction of the turbulent colonial past. So much so that the riots have often been singled out and invoked in discourses on religion and race relations. The event

¹ James Albert Michener, *Voices of Asia* (Secker & Warburg, 1952), p. 24.

serves, till today, as an admonition for Singaporeans that religion should never be enmeshed with secular and radical politics. More than that, it provides a potent historical lesson that excessive religious fervour, missionary zeal and moral assertiveness are undesirable and have no place within a progressive society. In November 1986, for example, upon protests launched by Malay-Muslims on both sides of the causeway in response to Israeli President Chaim Herzog's visit to the island-state, Singapore's Prime Minister, Lee Kuan Yew declared that such moves had the dangerous potential of provoking riots similar to that of in 1950 when all 'hell broke loose'.² Constant references to the riots served also as a subtle warning to the press that any attempts at incitement would be met with cessation of publication and criminal prosecution.³ Michael Hill has recently observed that the 'Maria Hertogh case has become something of an icon in the Singapore state's presentation of religious strife in its history and has been revisited on a number of occasions as an instance of the destabilising potential of religious conversion.'⁴

In contemporary Malaysia, memories of the riots and their ramifications have never faded. In fact, there arose a renewed interest in the popular media to re-enact a critical moment in the country's political history. Newspapers, magazine articles and documentaries have portrayed the riots as artefacts of nation-building, challenges to social cohesion and an imperialist plot on the part of the British and the Dutch against Islam. The riots serve as a moral warning for

² Loh Kah Seng, "Within the Singapore Story: The Use and Narrative of History in Singapore", *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 12, 2, (1998), p. 12.

³ Hong Lysa and Jimmy Yap, "The Past in Singapore's Present", *Commentary: Civil Society*, 11, 1, (1993), p. 36. See also, Eugene Tan, "We, the Citizens of Singapore...": Multiethnicity, its Evolution and its Aberrations", in Lai Ah Eng (ed.), *Beyond Rituals and Riots: Ethnic Pluralism and Social Cohesion in Singapore*, Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2004), p. 77.

⁴ Michael Hill, *The Elite-Sponsored Moral Panic: A Singapore Perspective* (Singapore: Centre for Advanced Studies, 2002), p. 23.

the nation that no attempt at diverting Muslims from their religion would be left unchallenged.⁵ To Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, the Maria Hertogh controversy marked the beginnings of his struggle for the country's independence from the British Empire. He recounted his rage towards those who had filed a lawsuit to gain custody of a Muslim girl. Maria Hertogh, the Tunku maintained, had been deprived of the care of her foster mother and was 'forcibly taken to the convent and converted to Christianity.' Nonetheless, 'I had gained much popular support for myself and the party I led as a result of this case.'⁶

HISTORIOGRAPHY

Despite such a premium placed on the incident and the emotions it has provoked, there has been no comprehensive account of the aftermath of the first among a series of incidents of mass violence in post-war Singapore. To the contrary, much ink has been spilled in examining the causes and factors that led to the outbreak and the eventual suppression of the Maria Hertogh riots. Paul R. Brass was not exaggerating when he noted that 'every scholar who has written about riots, pogroms, and other forms of collective violence seek their causes, and not a few scholarly articles feature the word in their titles.'⁷

⁵ See a series of articles on the Maria Hertogh Tragedy in *Dewan Masyarakat*, 27, 2, (1989); 27, 3 (1989); 27, 4, (1989); 27, 4 (1989). See *Utusan Malaysia*, 8th June, 2007.

⁶ Haja Maideen, *The Nadra Tragedy* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1989), pp. 15-16 and Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, *Looking Back: Monday Musings and Memories* (Kuala Lumpur : Pustaka Antara, 1977), pp. 189-191.

⁷ Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), p. 17.

A case in point would be the pioneering work of Rosemary Shantha Jesudason which explores how political and religious factors, coupled with the failure of the police force, resulted to the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots. Jesudason gives particular emphasis to examining the role of the press in propagating the idea that the Maria Hertogh case was a battle between Christianity and Islam. In the same vein, Nordin Hussin unveils the agency of a Malay newspaper, *Melayu Raya*, in agitating for mass violence.⁸ Differing slightly from these two works, Mary Kilcline Cody argues that the riots were caused by multiple factors that were discursively suppressed by a colonial document, the Riots Commission Inquiry, which was published some few months after the incident. By stressing the weaknesses of the Malay Police, the unmanaged Malay-Muslim feelings and events outside the Singapore Supreme Court, the British government endeavoured to remedy its 'weaknesses and thereby perpetuate its own legitimacy.'⁹ Be that as it may, Cody failed to shed light on other alternative causes to the riots and demonstrate the ways in which British legitimacy was preserved by the policies following the publication of the Riots Commission Inquiry.

The unravelling of the causes and factors that led to the Maria Hertogh riots pervades yet another genre of literature: personalised accounts which were written by individuals who were involved in, or witnesses of, the events that unfolded. A book written by the former Head of the Singapore Social Welfare

⁸ Rosemary Shantha Jesudason, "The Causes and Significance of the Hertogh Riots" (Unpublished Academic Exercise submitted to the Department of History, University of Malaya, 1969) and Nordin Hussin, "Malay Press and Malay Politics: The Maria Hertogh Riots in Singapore", *Asia-Europe Journal*, 4, 3, (2005), pp. 561-575.

⁹ Mary Kilcline Cody, "Mis-Fits in the Text: The Singapore Riots of 1950" (Unpublished Academic Exercise submitted to the Faculty of Asian Studies, Australian National University, 2001), p. 34.

Department, Tom Eames Hughes' *Tangled Worlds*, provides insights into the cultures and practices that were prevalent in Southeast Asia, especially in the realm of the adoption of children and inter-ethnic marriages, which provides the background of the legal conflicts.¹⁰ This was succeeded by Haja Maideen's *The Nadra Tragedy* and Joe Conceicao's *Singapore and the Many-Headed Monster* which narrates the genesis and evolution of circumstances that led to the riots.¹¹ Due to their personalised nature, these books lack proper citations. Haja Maideen's work is to be singled out as it has been regarded as one of the most authoritative accounts of the Maria Hertogh controversy. Yet the work is filled with loaded judgements, bordering on the realm of imaginary and fairy-tale like accounts, which are poorly supported by reliable sources. Consider for example the following account:

When she (Maria Hertogh) retired to bed, waves of worrying thoughts lashed out intermittently. She dreamt throughout the night. She dreamt she was taken far, far way – out of reach of her beloved Aminah and Mansoor. Some unknown forces were dragging her to the uncertain destiny. She suddenly woke up and cried, 'Emak.'¹²

Furthermore, the authors provide relatively limited discussion of the aftermath of the riots. Only eight out of 300 pages of Haja Maideen's book touch on the subsequent arrests of prominent Muslims, the appeal trials, Tunku Abdul Rahman's role in petitioning for the reprieve of those condemned to death and the annulment of the marriage between Maria Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi by British

¹⁰ Tom Eames Hughes, *Tangled Worlds: The Story of Maria Hertogh* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1980).

¹¹ Haja Maideen, *The Nadra Tragedy* (Petaling Jaya, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1989) and Joe Conceicao, *Singapore and the Many-Headed Monster* (Singapore: Horizon Books, 2007).

¹² Haja Maideen, *The Nadra Tragedy*, p. 192.

and Dutch courts. Following Hughes' lead, Haja Maideen concludes with a tragic narration of Maria Hertogh's failed attempt to murder her Dutch husband, which revealed how the British judge was wrong in his judgment and 'failed to determine what would make her more happy.'¹³

Extending beyond the narrow scope of the above-mentioned works, Mohamed Ansari, Firdaus Haji Abdullah, Anthony J. Stockwell, Nordin Hussin and Ramlah Adam situate the causes of the riots within a broader context of Islamic resurgence, the fear of Christian missionary activities, threats posed by Communism, anti-colonial movements in Southeast Asia, racial animosities and British imposition of laws that ran contrary to Islamic teachings. These authors made effective use of declassified colonial correspondence files and intelligence reports and other sources, such as Muslim periodicals, confidential minutes of several Muslim committees and interviews with various Muslim personalities. More importantly, such works have broken some new ground through their expositions of the wider impact of the riots upon the British colonial administration in Singapore and Britain. Ansari, Firdaus and Nordin highlight, albeit in brief, several after-effects, such as the deterioration of the Anglo-Muslim relationship, the proscription of radical activities, the reformation of the police force, repercussions within the United Malay Nationalist Organisation (UMNO), and the impact upon Chinese as well as Eurasian communities. Adding to the above list, Stockwell and Ramlah narrate the tensions within Singapore, Malaya, and the wider Islamic world, namely, Indonesia and Pakistan which posed major challenges to the British. However, such accounts of the aftermath of the Maria

¹³ Haja Maideen, *The Nadra Tragedy*, p. 307.

Hertogh riots tended to be descriptive rather than analytic.¹⁴ No attempt had been made to tease out the variety of strategies that were employed by the British to deal with various forms of the resistance against the colonial administration, the collaboration of the local elites, and the impact of these processes upon minorities in Singapore.

OBJECTIVES AND PERIMETERS OF THIS STUDY

In light of these limitations in the extant literature, this thesis pursues five main objectives which necessitate the employment of new data, original approaches and critical analyses to the study of the Maria Hertogh controversy. Consequently, new terrains in the history of colonial Southeast Asia in the post-war period will be charted.

The first objective is to initiate a shift beyond the study of the causes of riots towards an examination of the wide-ranging effects and crises faced in the aftermath. Particular attention will be given to the ways in which the colonized and the colonizer grappled with the restoration of peace and the rebuilding of a society that was torn asunder by mass violence. The study of the effects and crises in the aftermath of violent upheavals such as the Maria Hertogh riots is particularly important, as it calls for, 'the re-examination of the society as a whole,

¹⁴ Mohamed Ansari s/o Mohamed Ali Marican, "The Maria Hertogh Riots, 1950" (Unpublished Academic Exercise submitted to the Department of History, University of Singapore, 1973); Firdaus Haji Abdullah, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origins and Early Development* (Petaling Jaya: Pelanduk Publications, 1985), pp. 116-140; Anthony Stockwell, "Imperial Security and Moslem Militancy, with Special Reference to the Hertogh Riots in Singapore", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 7, 2, (1986), pp. 322-335; Nordin Hussin, "The Moslem Riots of 11 December 1950 in Singapore", *Kertas Kadangkala Bil. 2* (The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University Kebangsaan Malaysia); and Ramlah Adam, *Gerakan Radikalisme di Malaysia, 1938-1965* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2004), pp. 329-367.

its institutions as well as its component groups and symbols; the social dislocations provide opportunities for the analyst to penetrate and explore from within, and not merely arrive at some abstract notions of the phenomena arising from the contact between a colonial power and a colonial people.’¹⁵ Despite that, the causes and circumstances that led to the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots will not be neglected. In what follows, I will provide fresh reinterpretations of events and developments within and outside Singapore which shaped British strategies as well as responses of the local communities.

Secondly, in sharp contrast with previous studies and popular literature which depict the riots as part of a national narrative, this thesis will frame the Maria Hertogh controversy against the backdrop of British imperialism and decolonization in Southeast Asia. Herein, linkages between the British colonial administration in Singapore and the policymakers and officials in the Home Government and other colonies will be made apparent. To be sure, the British Empire functioned within a methodical framework whereby opinions and ideas of officials in the peripheries (the colonies) interacted with those of the metropole (Home Government) before crucial decisions and policies were executed. To focus solely upon micro-politics in the colonies is to lose sight of the macro-politics that defined the *modus operandi* of the British imperial network in the post-war era. The British Empire, as John Darwin has succinctly pointed out, ‘is best understood not as a territorial phenomenon but as the grand project for a

¹⁵ Georges Balandier, “The Colonial Situation: A Theoretical Approach”, in Immanuel Wallerstein (ed.), *Social Change: The Colonial Situation* (New York, Wiley, 1966), p. 52.

global system.’¹⁶ As a corollary, this thesis employs Ranajit Guha’s definition of the British colonial administration as:

the complex of organisations, activities, and discourses made up of a chain of command extending from Whitehall down to the lowest reaches of British authority...the bureaucracy with its rules, orders, and schedules, all levels of officially sponsored institutions from the central to the local, as well as the laws and executive decisions made by them and practical measures used to implement these. Taken together, they stand for the ensemble called colonial administration.’¹⁷

There were, predictably, instances where the actions of ‘men on the spot’ differed from those in higher levels of the colonial bureaucracy. Such inner tensions, which had a determining influence upon British attempts to recover their image and agency in the aftermath of the riots, will be explored in this thesis.

The third objective is to provide a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of British management of riots and mass violence in Southeast Asia. Larry J. Butler writes that British policies towards resistance movements, riots and insurgencies in the post World War Two period were characterized by a combination of ‘concession (designed to encourage moderates) and coercion (in order to contain extremists). But when overriding imperial interests were at stake, even if these were relatively short term, Britain was willing to resort to a more overt use of force...’¹⁸ Such arguments are congruent with those made by Frank

¹⁶John Darwin, “A Fourth British Empire”, in Martin Lynn (ed.), *The British Empire in the 1950s: Retreat or Revival?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 28.

¹⁷Ranjit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 82.

¹⁸Larry J. Butler, *Britain and Empire: Adjusting to a Post-Imperial World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), p. 194.

Füredi, who posits that British imperial policies in Malaya and other parts of Southeast Asia 'contained elements of both rigidity and flexibility, of repression and accommodation.'¹⁹ It is intriguing to note that both authors have glossed over British usage of its covert agencies – the intelligence services in particular – which performed not only the roles of 'concession' and 'coercion', but also the 'collection' of vital information for the purposes of anticipating and repelling all forms of opposition to colonial rule. Butler and Füredi have also overlooked 'self-criticism' as an essential part of British strategy to insulate the colonial administration from a continual loss of legitimacy, and to further justify its relevance and dominance upon colonized societies in the aftermath of mass violence. Chapters Four and Five of this thesis will address such neglected frontiers.

The fourth objective of this study is to narrate and analyse the responses by local communities in Singapore throughout the Maria Hertogh controversy. It is my contention that British strategies and policies can be better understood by elucidating the themes of resistance and collaboration, particularly that of the Muslims in Singapore. By illuminating such dialogical exchanges between the rulers and the ruled, this thesis cuts against the grain of 'what has come to be called a 'Europocentric mold, a frame of reference that assigns primacy to what the colonial rulers did rather than to the effects of their actions upon their native 'wards' and, at least equally important, to the reactions or responses of the indigenous society to the many-faceted colonial impact.'²⁰ The Nigerian historian

¹⁹ Frank Füredi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), p. 5.

²⁰ Harry Benda, "Foreword", in William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. viii. See for example, Edwin Lee, *The British as*

J.F.A. Ajayi sharply asserts that 'although Europeans were generally masters of the colonial situation and had political sovereignty, cultural and economic dominance, they did not possess a monopoly of initiative during the colonial period.'²¹ More to the point, I will draw upon, and propose new ways of analysing, various forms of resistance that were employed by Southeast Asian communities in confronting colonial rule. The first form of resistance involves violent acts, such as riots and rebellions. This is followed by active participation within colonial administrative structures such as Legislative Councils, political parties and other state sponsored organisations. Petitions and other forms of discursive engagements fit into the next level of approach. Fourth, in applying the theories and concepts of James C. Scott, David Nonini demonstrates how silence and passivity towards colonial policies served as potent forms of 'everyday resistance' and 'weapons of the weak' for peasants in British Malaya.²² To add to the above list, in Chapter Three, I will elaborate upon 'strategic desertion' as yet another form of resistance in situations where the above four approaches had proved futile. 'Strategic desertion' refers to a planned and conscious departure from the arena of contestation to a new site, beyond the colonial orbit of influence and control. Such a strategy was pursued with the intent of sustaining a form of resistance from without.

Rulers: Governing Multi-racial Singapore 1867-1914 (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1991) and criticisms of Edwin Lee's British-centred approach by Nicholas R. Clifford in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (1993), pp. 168-169.

²¹ J.F.A. Ajayi, "Colonialism: An Episode in African History", in Louis H. Gann and Peter Duignan (eds.), *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960* Vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 505.

²² Norman G. Owen, "Economic and Social Change", in Nicholas Tarling (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia* Vol. 4 Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 192-197. See also, James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) and Donald M. Nonini, *British Colonial Rule and the Resistance of the Malay Peasantry, 1900-1957* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1992).

Closely linked to the above, the final objective of this study is to extend and refine the corpus of literature pertaining to minorities in Southeast Asia, particularly, religious minorities under colonial rule. Paul H. Kratoska maintains that colonial regimes 'viewed ethnic and religious minorities as weak and vulnerable and in some instances established separate administrative areas and special laws or regulations to protect their interests.'²³ Although applicable in the context of post-war Singapore, Kratoska's assertion is inherently inadequate. In view of this, I will exhibit the ways in which British enactment of laws pertaining to the management of religions in the post-war period had, in actuality, a reverse effect of dispossessing Muslim and Christian minorities of their perceived religious rights. This resulted in the outbreak of mass violence and continual grievances in the years that ensued. Chapter Two and Seven of this thesis delve into this issue in greater detail.

To put it succinctly, in the following chapters, I shall develop the argument that the Maria Hertogh riots stemmed from British failure to address four crucial factors which shaped the Singapore Muslim community's attitudes towards the colonial regime: the influence of radical ideas, the effects of socio-economic marginalisation, press sensationalisation surrounding the legal controversy, and the ineffectiveness of the police force. The outbreak of the riots had a negative impact upon the image and role of the British colonial administration in Singapore, which jeopardised diplomatic ties between the British Empire, the Netherlands and the Muslim World. In response, the British utilised a symbiotic combination of proscription, surveillance, self-criticism, reconciliation and

²³ Paul H. Kratoska, "Country Histories and the Writing of Southeast Asian History", in Abu Talib Ahmad and Tan Liok Ee, *New Terrains in Southeast Asia History* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 114.

reform. Through these strategies, they sought to redeem their tarnished image, mitigate the negative effects of the riots, and anticipate similar outbreaks arising from racial and religious dissent. The politics, resistance, collaboration and ramifications upon minorities in Singapore arising from each of these five strategies will be brought to the fore.

Before engaging in a comprehensive discussion of sources, it is essential to point out the perimeters of this study. 'Muslims' here refers primarily to Indians, Arabs, Malays, Chinese, Eurasians and Europeans whose working language was Malay or English. The reactions of Muslim and non-Muslim Chinese and Indians expressed in their respective sub-ethnic dialects will not be thoroughly considered, due to the author's linguistic limitations. Their voices and agency have been partially recovered through the use of translations and English commentaries found within British, American and Australian intelligence reports, as well as excerpts from English-language and Malay-language newspapers. In the same vein, I will bring forth selected viewpoints and reactions of Dutch, Indonesian and Pakistani personalities and organisations in so far as they impacted upon the British colonial administration and other communities in Singapore and, to a lesser extent, Malaya. Such insights are by no means exhaustive. Indeed, it is crucial to point out that Dutch, Indonesian and the Pakistani activism in the course of the Maria Hertogh controversy requires a separate and scholarly analysis. Such an enormous undertaking is not possible within the confines of this thesis. The terms 'riots', 'outbreak of violence' and 'mass violence' are used interchangeably to describe crowds and groups of people who committed acts of violence towards Europeans as well Eurasians in the colony in reaction to the Maria Hertogh legal

case. 'Maria Hertogh' was also known by her Malay name, Nadra. I have maintained both names to refer to the same person.

The time frame of this thesis is from the end of the Second World War till the eve of the 1950s. Even so, the main part of my analysis begins from 13th December 1950, upon the discontinuation of mass violence. It ends towards the closing of the year 1953, which saw a fading of activity among all parties involved in the Maria Hertogh controversy. Some discussion will also be devoted to developments beyond the given time frame insofar as they illuminate or provide necessary background for the understanding of the causes and long-term effects of the riots.

SOURCES

Primary sources for this study are derived mainly from archives and libraries in the United Kingdom, the United States of America (USA), Australia, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. The data extracted from these sources have been synthesized to arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. The United Kingdom offers the most extensive collection of unpublished sources relating to the British colonial administration of Singapore, largely deposited at the National Archives (Public Record Office) at Kew. They are listed under different categories, and a large portion has been consulted by the author. The first category of sources are those compiled by the Colonial Office, which consists of policy decisions, correspondence files (secret and official), minutes of meetings, police records and political intelligence reports. These sources come

under the series codes, CO 323, CO 537, CO 717, CO 940, CO 953, CO 968, CO 1022 and CO 1030. This list is followed by sources that were categorised by the Foreign Office, which relates to Islamic affairs, the Maria Hertogh case and other developments in Singapore and Malaya listed under the series code, FO 371. Last in the list, though not of lesser significance, are the Prime Minister's Office files (PREM 11), as well as the Cabinet files (CAB 130).

These official sources are, however, not free from their inherent limitations. Dissensions, disputes and debates between personalities and departments plagued the day by day operation of the British bureaucracy, which led to shifts in viewpoints and policies. In my reading and utilization of these sources, I have paid serious attention to such developments which determined British management of Singapore and Malaya. As Anthony Stockwell has noted, it is vital 'to distinguish between the low cunning and paranoia of the security services and the high policy, if not complacency, of the more serious officials. While the Malayan Security Service was in the business of finding trouble, administrators were all too often for brushing it aside.'²⁴

Similar to the above, unpublished sources deposited in the United States of America and Australian archives, under the headings RG59 and A1838 respectively, have also been consulted. Consisting of in-depth reports and correspondences between intelligence agencies and diplomats, these sources provide third-party perceptions and assessments of various developments in Singapore in the 1950s.

²⁴ Stockwell, "Imperial Security and Moslem Militancy", p. 327.

The next category of unpublished sources that are relevant for this study is private papers. Sources deposited at the University of Durham Library which have been used are those previously owned by Malcolm Macdonald (United Kingdom Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, based in Singapore). Malcolm Macdonald, as C.M. Turnbull contended, 'has all disappeared from the history books, yet, in viewing the whole process of decolonization and the transition from the British Empire to the Commonwealth Nations, he is, I maintain, the most important single figure, often influential and sometimes decisive.'²⁵ Private papers of Robert Heussler (Malayan Civil Service Officer), John Dalley (Head of Malayan Security Service), Rene Onraet (Head of Special Branch), Andrew Howat Frew (Senior Police Officer) and other unpublished reports available in the Rhodes House Library at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge Library have been utilised. This list is complemented by the papers of Tan Cheng Lock (the President of the Malayan Chinese Association) found in the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Library in Singapore and Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba) papers that are deposited at the Za'ba Memorial Library in the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur. Another set of private papers that have been recovered are those that belonged to Mansoor Adabi, the husband of Maria Hertogh, whose marriage was annulled by the British judge in Singapore. Special permission was granted by his family to cite these sources for the purposes of this thesis. This valuable collection consists of photographs, correspondence, minutes of meetings and out-of-print periodicals. Written from a more personalized perspective, such sources offer intimate insights into a historical actor's views on

²⁵ C. M. Turnbull, "The Post-War Decade in Malaya: The Settling Dust of Political Controversy", *Journal of Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (J.M.B.R.A.S)*, 60, 1, (1987), p. 7.

events and personalities. They are, inevitably, not free from biases and value judgments.

Published materials constitute the second genre of sources. The *Hansards* (House of Commons debates) found in the Senate House Library in London have been consulted, and relevant materials have been drawn from them. University libraries in Singapore and Malaysia contain rich collections of published law reports, legislative proceedings, gazettes and annual reports on social affairs, education, economics, law and general information on Singapore and Malaya. These sources, which were more often than not, highly filtered and presented in ways that legitimized state and institutional policies, have been cross-examined with the unpublished sources listed above.

Various English and Malay newspaper collections, readily available for public access at the National Library of Singapore, the University of Malaya Library and the British Library at Colindale, are also brought to the fore. It is undeniable that such newspapers reflect the main concerns of actors in their times, embodying certain philosophical and ideological motives which determine the selection of news and the texture of commentaries.²⁶ John Lent went so far to assert that the press in post World War Two Asia has so often promoted “correct” ideas rather than the purveying of news - the raw material for the individual opinions that collectively make up public opinion - and the furnishing of a forum

²⁶ Mek Siti bt. Hussin dan Aminah bt. Mohd Nasir, “Isu-isu Penting (Awal 1950an) Dari Kaca Mata Akhbar Majlis dan Melayu Raya”, in Khoo Kay Kim (ed.), *Sejarah Masyarakat Melayu Moden* (Kuala Lumpur: Universiti Malaya, 1985), p. 250.

for the competition of ideas.'²⁷ For this research, I utilised a variety of newspapers published in Singapore and Malaya of the post-war period to propound a plethora of insights into the causes and, more so, the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. Foremost in this regard is *The Straits Times* which had a wide circulation of 55,000. Although independent, the paper was conservative, pro-British in its outlook and functioned as the voice of European expatriates in Singapore. This is followed by *Singapore Standard*, which was owned by Aw Boon Haw, a prominent Chinese merchant whose main objective of pioneering the paper was to propound 'Asian' viewpoints in the colony. By 1954, the paper had a circulation of 35,000 throughout Malaya. Three other newspapers included in this study are the *Straits Echo*, *Singapore Free Press* and *The Straits Budget*. Known for their publication of critical opinion pieces and political polemics, these newspapers had relatively small circulations of no more than 15,000. In the realm of Malay-language journalism, newspapers in Jawi Arabic script that have been examined include the *Utusan Melayu*, *Melayu Raya* and *Majlis*. The history and influence of these vernacular newspapers will be discussed in the next chapter. *The Muslim World*, *The Islamic World*, *Qalam*, and *Dawn* are Malay/Muslim periodicals which I have explored. Though of lesser importance, several newspapers from Indonesia and England have also been examined, so as to shed light on views and opinions outside Singapore and Malaya. They are *Antara*, *Indonesia Raya*, *Suara Masyarakat*, *Pedoman*, *Suara Ra'ayat*, *Observer*, *The Manchester Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Express* and *The Times*.

²⁷ John Lent, *The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1971), p. xvi

Oral sources are particularly useful for this study as they can assist in recovering 'neglected or silenced accounts of past experience, and as a way of challenging dominant histories, which underpin repressive attitudes and policy.'²⁸ Yet, it is imperative to point out that oral histories, like *all* historical sources, are inevitably coloured by various factors, such as social class backgrounds, political affiliations, gender and the age of the interviewees. The time, place and techniques of interviewing pose another set of complexities that moulds the ways in which past events are reconstructed. Initially, my plan was to rely on oral histories as primary sources, applying a minimum of influence on the shape of the interviews or, to put it differently, 'to let the interviewee talk. It's his show. Let him run with the ball.'²⁹ However, field trips to Singapore and Malaysia indicated that a majority of personalities who played crucial roles in the Maria Hertogh controversy have passed away. Many others declined to be interviewed because of failing memories and poor health. Although I interviewed several Singaporeans and Malaysians from various social backgrounds, a majority of the respondents preferred to remain anonymous. Nonetheless, I have managed to make use of oral sources in the National Archives of Singapore (NAS). Shaped by state-driven projects, this large collection of interviews consists of some eighty-one persons, including British officials, Muslim leaders, Europeans, Eurasians, Chinese, Malays and Indian personalities who were directly involved or implicated in the legal tussle and the subsequent riots.³⁰ Less than a dozen of these interviews dealt with the aftermath. Though relegated to a secondary position in view of the

²⁸ Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, "Advocacy and Empowerment: Introduction", in Robert Perks and Alistair Thompson, *The Oral History Reader* (New York; Routledge, 2003), p. 183.

²⁹ Charles T. Morrissey, "On Oral History Interviewing", in Perks and Thompson, *The Oral History Reader*, p. 108.

³⁰ See <http://www.a2o.com.sg/public/html/>.

limitations mentioned above, these interviews have been useful in confirming selected facts and viewpoints derived from written sources.

Aside from sources that pertain directly to the Maria Hertogh controversy, I have also drawn selectively from the works of renowned historians, anthropologists, philosophers, political scientists and sociologists who have written on related topics such as riots and mass violence, British colonialism and imperialism, forms of indigenous resistance, as well as minority studies. Ideas and assertions drawn from such works have been deployed, not as theoretical frameworks and models, but as 'heuristic tools' to aid in the analysis of the sources so as to sharpen the main arguments of this study.³¹

CHAPTERS

The structure of this thesis is broadly thematic. Each of the chapters adopts a chronological description and analysis of events, texts, views, persons and institutions.

Chapter Two provides an outline of the challenges faced by the British colonial administration in re-asserting their position in post-war Singapore following the Japanese Occupation from 1942 to 1945. The failure of the British colonial regime to address the influence of radical ideas, the effects of socio-economic marginalisation, press sensationalisation surrounding the legal controversy and the ineffectiveness of the police force, all of which shaped the

³¹ Christopher A. Bayly, "The State of the World/Reply", *Victorian Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Social, Political, and Cultural Studies*, 48, 1, (2005), p.134.

Singapore Muslim community's attitudes will be discussed here. Aside from that, this chapter illuminates the ways in which the British image and role had been tarnished by the outbreak of the riots.

British attempts at proscribing key instigators of violence are the main focus of Chapter Three. The concept of 'proscription' here is understood in its widest sense as deterrent and repressive measures taken against the main ideologues, instigators of violence, the media as well as the spread of rumours in the aftermath of the riots.

In the fourth chapter, I will focus on surveillance as manifested in the heightened role of British intelligence, especially in the realm of Muslim affairs. The chapter will also discuss how Special Branch agents and spies perceived and dealt with the different forms of threats which they encountered. At many junctures, such perceptions were guided by paranoia and unfounded fear.

Chapter Five discusses the strategy of self-criticism through the Riots Commission Enquiry and the disciplinary measures meted out to those colonial officials who were accused of mishandling the riots. British endeavour to insulate the higher echelons of the state machinery from a severe loss in legitimacy, the politics and challenges that surround it, will be unravelled in this chapter.

The process of reconciliation between the British and various parties that were implicated in the Maria Hertogh controversy are discussed in Chapter Six. In particular, the British stepped up their efforts to accommodate the influence and

role of religion in society, especially in response to the demands of Muslims in Singapore. Numerous persons who had suffered from the loss of kith and kin as well as property during the riots were also duly compensated by the colonial authorities.

Chapter Seven is an exposition of British attempts at reforming crucial aspects of their administration that were deemed to be the root causes of the outbreak and spread of the riots. Reforms were directed towards transforming the police force and education policies as well as marriage and child adoption laws. Emphasis will be given here to the dynamics, negotiations and resistance encountered in the midst of such efforts.

Aside from summarising the main arguments of this thesis, the concluding chapter interrogates the standpoints of renowned historians on the short-term and long-term effectiveness and ramifications of British management of crises within the colonies in the post-war era.



Maria Hertogh and Che Aminah
Source: Terenjit Singh and Family



Wedding photo of Maria Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi
Source: Terenjit Singh and Family



**At the residence of M.A. Majid.
At the back row: M.A. Majid standing next to Mansoor Adabi
Seated in front: Che Aminah, Maria Hertogh,
wife and children of M.A. Majid
Source: Terenjit Singh and Family**



**Demonstrators with banners and Pakistani flag outside the Supreme court
before the outbreak of riots
Source: National Archives of Singapore**

CHAPTER 2

The Colonial Setting and the Outbreak of Riots

Singapore, in the immediate post-war years, was a site of contestation between secular forces of communalism, communism and nationalism. Together with these developments, there was a revival of religious activities in the colony in response to social, political and economic challenges, as well as wider influences from South Asia and the Middle East. In the realm of everyday life, food shortages, diseases, poor housing, unemployment and social vices were the key problems in that age. Coupled with a weak police force plagued by rampant bribery and disorganisation, mass delinquency and criminal activities of all sorts were at its peak.³² A noted historian has described this era as one that was 'full of colour and incident, the clash of personalities and ideologies.'³³

Three and half years of Japanese rule had demystified the notion of white superiority and dominance. Even so, the British were determined to re-establish the paramount position of Singapore within their post-war imperial policy. Although the population had declined markedly due to the war, the island-colony retained a multi-racial and religious outlook where multiple diasporas intersected and interacted with one another. It became a centre for the transmission of ideas, values and ideologies. The attempts of the British to insulate Singapore from the sway of radical movements overseas proved to be ineffective because the dismantling of colonial empires in South Asia, Indonesia and Indochina, along

³² 'Memorandum for Commonwealth Conference, London; Note on the Singapore Memorandum (1950)', MSS. Ind. Ocn. s. 231.

³³ C.M. Turnbull, *A History of Singapore, 1819-1988* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xiii.

with the rise of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism, 'opened new horizons and dramatically raised expectations.'³⁴ In fact, regional links and global interactions were intensified in the post-war setting, which had, in effect, transformed Singapore into a breeding ground for militant radicalism.³⁵

In view of this, policymakers in Britain promoted the creation of a Pan-Malayan identity involving the development of strategic partnerships and aid programmes to ensure a more lasting friendship with the colonized peoples. This policy was institutionalised in the Malayan Union Scheme, which was formalised on 1st April, 1946.³⁶ Yet, Malays and other communities in the Malay Peninsula saw the implementation of the Malayan Union as an attempt to erode the powers of the Sultans and an impingement upon the special rights of the Malays. The United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) was thus registered in 1946, and began campaigning for what was to be known as the Federation of Malaya. Singapore was excluded from this Federation due to the Peninsula Malays' fear of Chinese numerical dominance on the island. Although a segment of the Muslim population in Singapore accepted such a rationale of political separation, many hoped that they would soon be incorporated into the larger mainland community, where kinship and familial ties were deeply-rooted.

³⁴ Timothy N. Harper, "Lim Chin Siong and the Singapore Story", in Tan Jing Quee and Jomo K.S. (eds.), *Comet in our Sky, Lim Chin Siong in History* (Kuala Lumpur: INSAN, 2001), p. 16.

³⁵ Timothy N. Harper, "Globalism and Pursuit of Authenticity: The Making of a Diasporic Public Sphere in Singapore", *Sojourn*, 12, 2, (1997), pp. 261-92.

³⁶ 'Dominions Office to High Commissioners, 21st January, 1946', CO 537/1528. For insights into the Malayan Union scheme and subsequent reactions by various groups in Malaya, see A.J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay politics during the Malayan Union Experiment 1945-1948*, (Singapore: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979); and Albert Lau, *The Malayan Union Controversy 1942-1948*, (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990).

To the members of the Malayan Communist Party (M.C.P.), the creation of the Federation was perceived as yet another measure on the part of the British to progressively proscribe their activities, specifically the militant front - the Malayan Races Liberation Army (M.R.L.A.). Upon the murder of three British rubber planters in Perak by M.R.L.A. guerillas on 18th June 1948, the British declared a state of emergency throughout Malaya. The enemy fighters were nicknamed 'bandits' and, in the years that followed, the label was changed to 'Communist Terrorists' (CTs).³⁷ As violence on both sides of the conflict escalated, the British Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, declared in the House of Commons that:

His Majesty's Government have no intention of relinquishing their responsibilities in Malaya until their task is completed. The purpose of our policy is simple. We are working in cooperation with the citizens of the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, to guide them to responsible self-government within the Commonwealth. We have no intention of jeopardising the security, well-being and liberty of these people, for whom Britain has responsibilities, by a premature withdrawal.³⁸

Accordingly, amidst the outward display of territorial 'separation' between Singapore and Peninsula Malaya following the Federation Agreement, close communication and coordination between British officials in the two territories persisted.³⁹ Tan Tai Yong observes that throughout the 1950s, British policymakers in Whitehall 'sought to base their policies on a regional approach.

³⁷ Susan L. Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds: British Governments, the Media and the Colonial Counter-insurgency* (London: Leicester University Press, 1995), p. 85 and Chin Peng, *My Side of History* (Singapore: Media Masters, 2003), p. 10.

³⁸ 'Official Report, 13th April, 1949: Vol. 463, c. 2815', quoted in 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 3, March 1950', CO 537/ 5302.

³⁹ 'J.M. Gullick to Robert Heussler, 26th August, 1982', Robert Heussler Papers.

The consolidation of regionalism - based on security pacts, policy coordination, and economic cooperation - was regarded as essential to the security of the region, and its natural corollary was the coming together, eventually, of the states of Southeast Asia into a regional bloc.⁴⁰ Be that as it may, British policies and strategies had to be periodically revised in response to the changing conditions within Malaya and the emergence of other superpowers in the region. When viewed from the perspective of defence planners in London, Singapore's position within British Grand Strategy in Southeast Asia was no less than 'sacrosanct, making the prospect of withdrawal unthinkable.'⁴¹ Indeed, the island was regarded as a strategic base to ensure the continuation of British global leadership in the post-war era.⁴²

MUSLIMS IN SINGAPORE

In the face of such a rapidly evolving context, Muslims in Singapore recognised that a brave new world was about to be born, and that the onus was upon them to shape it in the ways which they desired. The era was marked by the birth of a new 'public sphere' manifested in the form of newspapers, journals, rallies, strikes, unions, parties and modes of thought.⁴³ The 1947 census revealed that Singapore's population was estimated to be over one million, out of which, 77.6% were 'Chinese', 12.2% 'Malays', 7.6% 'Indians', 1.0% 'Europeans', 1.0%

⁴⁰ Tan Tai Yong, "The 'Grand Design': British Policy, Local Politics, and the Making of Malaysia, 1955-1961", in Marc Frey, Ronald W. Pruessen and Tan Tai Yong (eds.) *The Transformation of Southeast Asia: International Perspectives on Decolonization* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), p. 146.

⁴¹ Matthew Jones, "A Decision Delayed: British Withdrawal from South East Asia Reconsidered", *The English Historical Review*, CXII, 472, (2002), p. 572. See also, Nicholas Tarling, *The Fall of Imperial Britain in South-East Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 171-188.

⁴² Martin Lynn, "Introduction", in Lynn (ed.), *The British Empire in the 1950s*, p. 10.

⁴³ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).

'Eurasians' and 0.8% were categorised as 'Others'.⁴⁴ Arabs were often intermixed between the categories of 'Malay' and 'Others'. Exact figures for the population of Muslims in the colony lurked in the realm of the unknown till the end of the 1950s. Each of the Annual Reports for the years 1954 through 1956 maintained that an 'enumeration of religions has not been made and indeed scarcely possible. The Malay[sians] are almost without exception Muslim....Of the Indian community about 70 per cent are Hindu, 20 per cent Muslim, 5 per cent Christian and 2 per cent Sikh.'⁴⁵ This was no more than a cursory glance at the heterogenous nature of Muslims in Singapore.

Upon deeper scrutiny, Muslims were, in the main, fragmented along the lines of ethnicity, ideology, notions of belonging, class, affiliation to organisations and geographical location. In terms of ethnicity, most Muslims in Singapore were of Malay origin. Still, the Malays were not a homogenous ethnic bloc. Judith Djamour, in her book entitled *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore*, notes that the Malays in Singapore of the 1950s were divided into two broad groupings. The first grouping consisted of those whose families had migrated from the Peninsula and had lived in the colony for several generations. The second grouping were immigrants from Indonesia, mainly Javanese, Baweanese, Bugis and Banjarese, who had been settled on the Island for one, two or three generations. 'Very few Indonesians immigrants, for instance, would claim to be Malays unless they were accepted as such by the village community.'⁴⁶ These potent lines reveal the fluidity with which the Malay-Muslim identity was defined

⁴⁴ *Annual Report – Colony of Singapore: 1947* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1948), p. 15.

⁴⁵ *Annual Report – State of Singapore: 1956* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1957), p. 27.

⁴⁶ Judith Djamour, *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore* (London: Athlone Press, 1965), p. 4.

at that time. Arab, Indian, Pakistani and Chinese Muslims were small in numbers, and their assimilation into the Malay society was dependent upon their participation in socio-religious activities and adoption of the Malay language and culture - a process commonly known as *Masok Melayu* ('Becoming Malay'). The Chinese girls were, in most instances, converted to Islam through the practise of informal adoption. Sold by their Chinese parents to Malay and Indian families, these female infants were called *anak beli* (a bought child). Differing slightly from the other sub-ethnic groupings, marriage was the key factor that accounted for the conversion of a small number of Europeans and Eurasians to Islam, and their subsequent integration into the Malay community.⁴⁷

The second line of partisanship was ideological, due primarily to affiliations towards differing schools of Islamic jurisprudence and sectarian beliefs. Arabs and Malays derived their understanding of Islamic laws from the *Shafi'i* School, whereas the Indian Muslims subscribed to the *Hanafi* tradition. There were also members of the Muhammadiyah movement, whose approach to Islamic jurisprudence transcended the four accepted schools of law (*Shafi'i*, *Hanafi*, *Maliki* and *Hanbali*).⁴⁸ All were, however, Sunni. The 'Shiite' and the 'Ahmadiyya' - two groups which constituted several other sub-sects - formed the next level of sectarianism and were regarded as minorities within a predominantly Sunni Muslim community. These sects were often labelled as heterodox and were stigmatised by the Sunnis. Shiite elites were, however, active within several

⁴⁷ Djamour, *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore*, p. 8. and pp. 92-101.

⁴⁸ The headquarters of the Muhammadiyah movement was at 903-A Lorong Tai Seng. It existed as an informal group until its formalisation on 25th December, 1957. Members of the group were frequently assaulted by Muslims who regarded them as 'unorthodox' and insolent towards the varied inherited beliefs of Islam among Malays. For more information on British perceptions of the movement, see 'Special Branch Intelligence Summary (No.4, 5 and 8/60)', FO 1091/107.

Muslim associations, but would often conceal their religious leanings. On the other hand, the Ahmadiyya movement, whose headquarters were based at Lahore in Pakistan, received constant warnings from Muslims on the island and was in the centre of controversy due to its active missionizing.⁴⁹ Like the Ahmadiyya, proponents and sympathisers of communism were shunned by most Malays who perceived the communist ideology and its objectives as un-Islamic. Upon the declaration of the Malayan Emergency in 1948, the number of Malay communists declined rapidly to a few prominent radicals who were later proscribed or driven underground.⁵⁰ Paradoxically, spiritual cults and invulnerability sects, which were regarded by Muslim scholars as wayward and deviant, mushroomed within this tumultuous milieu.⁵¹

Not all Muslims in Singapore upheld the idea that Singapore was the definite place where they belonged. Notions of belongingness were fluid, especially among Indians and Arabs. A small yet influential number of Indian Muslims were deeply involved in campaigning for the creation of Pakistan and maintained close links with their ancestral home.⁵² The Arabs, who originally hailed from Yemen in a region called Hadramaut, maintained trade and familial ties with relatives in the homeland with the aim of preserving fundamental aspects of their traditions, culture and language. Even though signs of cultural dilution were apparent due to the disruptions caused by the Second World War, the

⁴⁹ For a discussion on controversies surrounding the Shi'ite and Lahore Ahmadiyya movement in Singapore, see Christoph Marcinkowski, *Facets of Shi'ite Islam in Contemporary Southeast Asia (II): Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, 2006), pp. 20-40 and Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hasan, "Versions of Eternal Truths: Ulama and Religious Dissenters in Kedah Malay Society", *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, 8, 1989, pp. 43-69.

⁵⁰ 'Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal No. 8/1948', CO 537/3751.

⁵¹ 'Malayan Security Services, Political Intelligence Journals, 8/1946', John Dalley Papers and "Religious Cults in Malaya", CO 537/1583.

⁵² See 'HQ Malaya Command Weekly Intelligence Summary', CO 537/1582.

practise of sending Arab children for religious instruction and enculturation in places in Yemen such as Tarim and Sana'a was still pervasive in the 1950s.⁵³ Most Malays maintained that the island of Singapore and the Peninsula Malaya was a single entity to which they all belonged. Anthony Stockwell writes in the most lucid way that:

Like Janus, the Malay community in Singapore looked in two directions at once, and its attitude to Malay problems in the island often differed from the line it adopted with regard to peninsula matters. Singapore-Malaya relations, communal questions and the Indonesian link were viewed from different angles by Singapore Malays as they straddled the causeway and shifted from foot to foot.⁵⁴

There existed also a highly-politicised minority within the Malay population whose loyalties extended outward to the wider *Nusantara* (The Malay World). These were ardent supporters and promoters of the Indonesian Revolution and the unification of Singapore, Malaya and Indonesia into what was called the *Melayu Raya*.⁵⁵

Muslims in Singapore were also divided into several classes as reflected in their occupational patterns which, in turn, had had a great bearing upon the nature of public engagement and reactions to issues pertaining to Islam.⁵⁶ Arabs and Indian Muslims were economically more established. Although small in numbers,

⁵³ Ameen Ali Talib. "Hadramis in Singapore", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 1997, p. 93.

⁵⁴ Anthony J. Stockwell, *British Policy and Malay Politics during the Malayan Union Experiment 1945-1948* (Singapore: Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1979), p. 122.

⁵⁵ See Yong Mun Cheong, *The Indonesian Revolution and the Singapore Connection, 1945-1949* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003).

⁵⁶ Francis G. Carnell, "Communism and Communalism in Malaya", *Pacific Affairs*, 26, 2, (1953), p. 106.

they were generally of the higher classes and were active in providing socio-economic, religious and political leadership. Whilst a majority among the members of these two ethnic groupings maintained friendly relations with the British, their attitudes and approaches towards the colonial regime oscillated from collaboration to overt resistance. Indian Muslims of the lower classes, in the words of a British intelligence report, 'largely identified with the Malay population and shared the downtrodden position of being economically marginalised.'⁵⁷ The common occupations for men of the lower classes were office clerks, labourers, drivers and seamen, as well as the lower ranks of the police force, the fire-fighting services and the military. Everyday life for an average Malay was described by a poignant expression, *Kais pagi makan pagi, kais petang makan petang*, which means living from hand to mouth. Illiteracy, poor education and reliance upon information via word of mouth characterised the lower segments of the Muslim community. These factors contributed to the ease with which passions were inflamed in the course of the Maria Hertogh controversy.

Another line of division was in the form of organisations. This was the period in which Muslims of varied social backgrounds and political leanings would organise themselves under the banner of uniquely named bodies. There were no less than one hundred registered organisations in total, and the membership of individual bodies could be as high as several thousands. In most cases, only half a dozen die-hard enthusiasts were enlisted and the life span of these organisations usually did not last beyond a year of activism. The Muslim

⁵⁷ 'Political developments in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, October/November, 1948', CO 537/ 2677.

Advisory Board, *Jamiyah* (the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society), the Singapore Muslim League, Singapore UMNO (SUMNO), the Young Men's Muslim Association, the Muslim Welfare Association, the *Kesatuan Melayu Singapura* (Singapore Malay Union), the *Kesatuan Kebajikan Perempuan Islam* (Singapore Malay Women's Welfare Association) and the *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung* (Association of Malays in the Peninsula) were among the most prominent and influential organisations in campaigning for Muslim rights in the public realm. Concurrently, activists within these organisations functioned as editors and writers in newspapers, journals and periodicals, such as *The Muslim World*, *The Islamic World*, *Dawn*, *Qalam*, *Sinaran*, *Utusan Melayu* and *Melayu Raya*. The *Utusan Melayu* became one of the most widely-read newspapers in Singapore and Malaya, influencing and shaping the psyche of the Malays.⁵⁸ By 1954, its circulation was reported to have reached 22,000. A majority of the subscribers were based in Malaya and the newspaper was also distributed in parts of Indonesia. Renowned for its independence from any party or state interests, several of its editors and journalists faced imprisonment for their radical views and affiliations.⁵⁹ Even so, *Utusan Melayu's* influence upon the Malay society was not left unchallenged. A rival newspaper, the *Melayu Raya*, was published in Singapore beginning on 29th August, 1950. Regarded in its time as the defender of Malay rights, *Melayu Raya* shot to prominence during the Maria Hertogh episode. By the end of December 1950, it had gained the support of more than 7000 shareholders and a circulation of about 28,000 copies throughout Malaya. A

⁵⁸ Ismail Hussein, "Singapura Sa-bagai Pusat Kesusasteraan Melayu Sa-lepas Perang", *Dewan Bahasa*, 3, 2, (1959), p. 540.

⁵⁹ For an illuminating discussion of the shifting fates of *Utusan Melayu's* employees, see A. Samad Ismail, *Memoir A. Samad Ismail di Singapura* (Bangi: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 1993).

majority of its directors was ex-members of the Malay Nationalist Party (MNP) and were described by British intelligence agencies as having 'extremist views.'⁶⁰

In terms of geographical location, Arabs and Indians were interspersed in the central and eastern parts of Singapore and other districts that were dominated by Europeans and Eurasians. Malays were located within several sub-ethnic enclaves in the south-eastern and south-western parts of the island, largely living in squatter settlements and densely populated *kampongs* built on low-lying swampy areas. Sanitation and drainage was poor. Endemic diseases such as typhoid, cholera, tuberculosis and malaria were rampant. The Bugis, Javanese and Baweanese were located near Kampung Glam, adjacent to the Sultan's palace and mosque. Malays from the Peninsula settled in villages at Telok Blangah, Tanglin, Holland Road, Paya Lebar, Geylang and Jalan Eunus.⁶¹ This partly explains why the Maria Hertogh riots and subsequent skirmishes were most intense in these areas.

Despite their divisions along various lines, Muslims in Singapore would often rally together as a cohesive whole in the face of infringements upon their religious rights. Indian Muslims of this period were particularly acknowledged for the forging of strategic alliances with their co-religionists to pursue religious goals. A fine example of this was the formation of a Muslim political party which

⁶⁰ 'Political Summary August 1950 – Part III – Colonial Territories – Federation of Malaya', CO 537/6087.

⁶¹ B.W. Hodder, "Racial Groupings in Singapore", *Malayan Journal of Tropical Geography*, 1, (1953), pp. 31-32.



contested the 1949 municipal elections.⁶² The party's founder was Karim Ghani, who, although not a 'Malayan' by descent, was able to bring together Muslims of different sectarian, ethnic and class backgrounds amidst the restrictions imposed by the Emergency.⁶³ Karim Ghani was however not alone in his quest to reassert the place of Islam in society. The need to heighten awareness and attachment to Islamic precepts and worldview, which had ironically deteriorated during the painful experience of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore, was the concern of most Muslim elites in the colony. Undeniably, prayers and other basic Islamic rites were neglected by the Muslim masses, and mosque attendance was relatively low.⁶⁴ The highly acclaimed autobiographical novel *Salina*, which is now regarded as an important source of information on social life in 1950s Singapore, records most vividly the moral laxness of Muslims who were beleaguered by prostitution and other sexual vices.⁶⁵

In the main, British policy towards Islam in Singapore was riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions. Rapid transformations within the Muslim community meant that policies had to be adapted to changing conditions and circumstances. As early as 1947, intensive measures had been undertaken to curb Indonesian and Islamic influences on the island as manifested in the MNP and its

⁶² 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 8th September, 1949', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers. See also, Rajeswary Ampalavanar, *The Indian Minority and Political Change in Malaya* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 32.

⁶³ E. Kay Gillis, *Singapore Civil Society and British Power* (Singapore: Talisman, 2005), pp. 136-171.

⁶⁴ For an illuminating account of Malays' declining adherence towards Islam during the Japanese Occupation, see Abu Talib Ahmad, *Malay-Muslims, Islam and the Rising Sun: 1941-1945*, Kuala Lumpur: MBRAS, 2003, pp. 176-196.

⁶⁵ See A. Samad Said, *Salina* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1961) and Virginia Matheson Hooker, *Writing a New Society: Social Change through the Novel in Malay* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), pp. 221-249.

militant youth wing, *Angkatan Pemuda Insaf* (API).⁶⁶ In the same year, the pre-war Mohammedan Advisory Board was re-established and renamed the Muslim Advisory Board to ensure increased communication between the British government and the Muslim community in dealing with potential threats. Yet, by mid-1948, Malcolm Macdonald and the Colonial Office were convinced that the real battle was against Communism and not Islam.⁶⁷ 'Communism', as described by a British political report, 'is the greatest single factor which is likely to aggravate the internal Security of Malaya during the next few years, in peace or in war.'⁶⁸ At the same time, the Special Branch kept a close watch on the movements and ideas of Muslim revivalists and radicals from the Middle East and South Asia, which were influencing the minds of the literate segment of the Muslim community in Singapore. The probability of an open rebellion or mass violence by Muslims was, however, ruled out. Rather, it was believed that militant Islam in Malaya 'would not go beyond seditious public speaking and boycotts'.⁶⁹ Coupled with press sensationalism and an ineffective police force, it was the failure to contain radical influences, the social estrangement and economic crises faced by the Singapore Muslim community that resulted in the outbreak of mass violence amidst the Maria Hertogh legal controversy.

THE MARIA HERTOIGH LEGAL CONTROVERSY

Maria Huberdina Bertha Hertogh was born at Tjimahi, Java, on 24th March, 1937. Her father, Adrianus Petus Hertogh, was a Dutch soldier who served

⁶⁶ 'Malayan Security Services, Political Intelligence Journals, 2/1946', John Dalley Papers. See also, 'Malay Nationalist Party', CO 537/7243 and 'Angkatan Pemuda Insaf', CO 537/2151.

⁶⁷ Stockwell, "Imperial Security and Moslem Militancy", p. 327.

⁶⁸ 'Internal Security Malaya, 14th June 1948', CO 537/6006.

⁶⁹ 'Internal Security Malaya, 14th June 1948', CO 537/6006.

in the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army. Adrianus' wife, Adeline Hertogh, was a Eurasian who grew up in Java. Both were Roman Catholics at the time of Maria Hertogh's birth, and she was baptized a Catholic on the 10th April, 1937. Upon the Japanese invasion of Java, Adrianus became a prisoner of war and was separated from his family. To ease the burden of raising five young children, Adeline sent Maria Hertogh to be cared for by one of her mother's friends named Che Aminah binte Mohamed, a Muslim of the Shafi'i school of jurisprudence who resided in Bandung. This was the genesis of the legal contentions in the years to come. Che Aminah denied this account during the court proceedings, claiming that the child was handed over to her for permanent adoption. Her allegation was supported by Adeline's elder brother, Soewaldi Hunter, who witnessed the adoption process. Che Aminah further asserted that Maria Hertogh was circumcised in 1943 in the presence of her mother and grandmother. Arguing against this, Mrs Hertogh asserted that she was arrested by the Japanese on her way to fetch Maria Hertogh from Che Aminah's house and was interned until the end of the war. Che Aminah then proceeded to raise Maria Hertogh as a Muslim and in the Malay way of life. After the end of the Japanese occupation in 1945, the Hertoghs returned to the Netherlands, having been unable to locate their child. A prolonged search by Dutch officials with the support of the British finally revealed that Maria Hertogh was living with Che Aminah at Kemamam in Trengganu, Malaya. A British official, Arthur Locke, requested Che Aminah to be present at a meeting with the Dutch Acting Consul-General in Singapore so as to ascertain Maria Hertogh's status as her foster child. Having acquiesced to the request, Che Aminah soon realized that she had been lured into a legal battle that changed the entire course of her life.

On the 22nd April, 1950, the Dutch Acting Consul-General in Singapore, Jacob van der Gaag, obtained an order for custody in the High Court of Singapore under the Guardianship of Infants Ordinance, directing that the child should be delivered to the Social Welfare Department. A further order was obtained on the 19th May, 1950 which gave van der Gaag the liberty to restore Maria Hertogh to her parents in the Netherlands. Che Aminah, in turn, lodged an appeal that was heard in June. The court declared the proceedings null and void, as neither Che Aminah nor Maria Hertogh, who were the necessary parties to the case, had been properly served copies of the orders, as required by the Rules of the British Supreme Court. The Judge contended that 'the document purporting to be an Originating Summons was prepared in a hurry and without adequate care' by van der Gaag, who had no legal right to claim the custody of Maria Hertogh. All claims must be based on kinship relations and the Acting Consul-General was not empowered to act on behalf of Adrianus Hertogh.⁷⁰ The stage was thus being set for the legal tussle to escalate beyond the concerns of the British colonial administration in Singapore.

A few weeks later, the Netherlands Ambassador in Britain sent a strongly worded letter to the Home Government urging that Maria Hertogh be restored to her parents. The legal decision that was made by the British Supreme Court in Singapore, wrote the Dutch official, 'was not at all clear and perhaps only formal.' It was feared that Maria Hertogh would, at the very least, be forced into marriage or in the worst state of affairs, kidnapped and hid in the jungle.⁷¹ The British Foreign Office responded empathetically to Dutch demands by stating that the

⁷⁰ "In the Matter of Maria Huberdina Hertogh, An Infant; Amina Binte Mohamed v. The Consul-General for the Netherlands, July 28, 1950", *The Malayan Law Journal*, 16, (1950), pp. 214-218.

⁷¹ 'Aide Memoire, 29th July, 1950', FO 371/84676.

Home Government had no *locus standi* in the matter and that 'any appeal against the court decision should be made by the Netherlands Consul-General in Singapore through his solicitors.'⁷²

In Singapore and Malaya, the Court of Appeal's decision had been misinterpreted by Muslims to the effect that Che Aminah had been awarded full custody of Maria Hertogh. To add fuel to the already inflamed sensibilities of the Dutch, on 1st August, 1950, a marriage was arranged between thirteen-year-old Maria Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi, who was twenty-one-years-old and a probationary teacher from Kelantan. In his personal reminiscences of the Maria Hertogh controversy, Mansoor Adabi recollected his naivety concerning the implications of his marriage to Maria Hertogh, because his knowledge of colonial and Islamic laws was superficial. It was proposed that he was to be in matrimony via what was called in the Malay language, *nikah gantung* (a truncated marriage). This was a common practice among Malays in post-war Malaya and Singapore, who regarded it as a necessary measure to safeguard young couples from engaging in free mixing and uncontrolled interactions that are forbidden in Islam. The word 'gantung' which means truncated connotes that the marriage, although valid from the perspective of Islam, was 'incomplete'. From the Malay cultural point of view, the *nikah* (solemnization) must be followed by wedding rites known as *bersanding* in order for the marriage to be considered as thoroughly fulfilled. Mansoor had hoped to return to Kelantan with Maria Hertogh following the *bersanding* rites and his graduation from the teacher training course.⁷³

⁷² 'Thomas. Lloyd to John D. Higham, 29th July, 1950', FO 371/84676.

⁷³ *Dewan Masyarakat*, 27, 3, (1989), pp. 12-13.

Muslims in Singapore in the 1950s were divided on the acceptability of such child marriages. Many held on to the view that the timing of the marriage was inappropriate. At the same time, the British Home Government sought yet again to defuse Dutch agitation for intervention in the controversy. An assurance was made by the British that affirmative steps would be undertaken to ensure that Maria Hertogh's minority status would be protected and that the Singapore Governor would keep the Dutch government updated on all developments.⁷⁴ An official at the British Foreign Office anticipated that the case was 'going to have considerable repercussions on public opinion in Holland and consequently on relations between the United Kingdom and Holland.'⁷⁵ His reading of the situation was prophetic.

Catholic activists in the Netherlands issued several public statements exhorting the British government to give satisfactory explanations for what was branded as policies biased against Dutch subjects in the colonies. An anonymous letter was sent to a British official at the Hague threatening him 'with death unless Bertha Hertogh is placed on the next boat to Holland.'⁷⁶ In unison with this, developments in Singapore have generated the interest of a member of the Dutch royalty, Queen Juliana Louise Wilhelmina, who was active in promoting the welfare of children in developing countries. At Bergen op Zoom, a 'Bertha Hertogh Committee' was established to provide the best legal representation and to pay for expenses incurred by Adeline and Adrianus Hertogh. \$80,000 guilders

⁷⁴ 'William Strang to R.H. Scott, 9th August, 1950', FO 371/84676.

⁷⁵ 'J.O. Lloyd (Foreign Office) to H. Drake (Colonial Office), 5th August, 1950', CO 323/1922/11.

⁷⁶ 'Philip Nichols (The Hague) to Ernest Bevin, 29th August, 1950', CO 323/1922/11.

had been raised within a span of a few weeks.⁷⁷ The Maria Hertogh controversy also gained much publicity and provoked strong reactions from politicians and organisations in major Muslim countries, such as Pakistan, Indonesia and even as far away as Saudi Arabia. Letters promising financial help were sent to Muslim organisations in the colony.

In Singapore, British officials saw the affair as developing:

to a small extent in the public eye into an inter-religious and inter-racial question. Attempts were made to enlist the intervention of educated and influential Muslims to prevent further complications. Although they deplore the manner in which this marriage has taken place and consider the bride to be young, their attitude is that as the marriage is legal according to the law of Islam, it would be wrong for them to intervene. The Dutch Consul-General made representations that action should be taken by Government against Mansoor Adabi, possibly under the Emergency Regulations, but he was informed there was no action which the Government could legally take to prevent the course of events or interfere in the matter which was clearly one of legal concern.⁷⁸

Admittedly, the British were unsure of the proper course of action as any wrong moves would affect public opinion towards the government. On the one hand, Muslim organizations were permitted to raise public funds in aid of Che Aminah's legal battle for the custody of Maria Hertogh. On the other hand, British policymakers attempted to introduce the Laycock Marriage Bill on the lines of the 1929 Age of Marriage Act in the United Kingdom, to 'make void marriages

⁷⁷ 'H.B.C. Keeble (Foreign Office) to J.T.A. Howard-Drake (Colonial Office), 28th August, 1950', CO 323/1922/11 and J. van der Gaag, *Vrijgevochten* (Naarden: Strengolt, 1984), p. 132.

⁷⁸ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 19th August, 1950', FO 371/84676.

between persons either of whom is under the age of sixteen.’⁷⁹ The bill was, presumably, a spontaneous reaction to the ongoing Maria Hertogh controversy. Campaigning on the behalf of modernist-oriented female activists in post-war Singapore, Che Zaharah bte Noor Mohamed, supported the Laycock Bill. She went further to highlight on the abuse of Muslim women, which has its roots from the backward interpretation of Islam in the Malay World.⁸⁰ Such radical stances drew severe criticism from the *ulama* (Muslim scholars) in Malaya who unanimously condemned the bill as anti-Islam.⁸¹ Other organisations, such as *Jamiyah*, the Tamil Muslim Union and the Muslim Welfare Association joined in the fray to protest against the implementation of bill. The editorials of *Utusan Melayu*, *Melayu Raya* and *Qalam* warned the Singapore Governor, Sir Franklin C. Gimson, to exercise utmost discretion before deciding upon the implementation of laws that would result in a worsening of Muslim confidence in his leadership.⁸² Consequently, the bill was amended, with Muslims excluded from its provisions. It was regarded at that time as a major victory for the Muslims.⁸³ More importantly, the episode had also revealed the embedded weakness of the British colonial administration in facing up to the resistance of its Muslim subjects.

Concurrently, an originating Summons filed by Maria Hertogh’s parents was issued in the High Court of Singapore, requesting that the marriage of

⁷⁹ ‘Singapore Political Report for August, 1950’, FO 371/84509 and *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th September 1950 and 13th October 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 317 and pp. B381-382.

⁸⁰ *Malaya Tribune*, 19th April 1947; 25th November 1947 and *Malaya Tribune*, 3rd January 1948. See also: Lenore Manderson, *Women, Politics and Change: The Kaum Ibu UMNO, Malaysia 1945-1972* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 54-55.

⁸¹ *Straits Times*, 31st October 1950; *Melayu Raya*, 13th Nov, 1950 ; *The Straits Budget*, 7th December 1950.

⁸² *Utusan Melayu*, 1st October 1950 and *Qalam*, Bilangan 3, October 1950.

⁸³ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 13th October 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B385 and *Qalam*, Bilangan 3, October 1950.

Mansoor and Maria Hertogh be declared illegal and that she be restored to her parents in the Netherlands. At the hearing which was attended by hundreds of Muslims, Justice Brown of the Singapore High Court awarded the custody of Maria Hertogh to her parents on the grounds that the court had no power to absolve parental rights. The judge declared that the 'marriage' of Maria Hertogh to Mansoor Adabi was invalid, on the grounds that Maria Hertogh was legally domiciled in the Netherlands. Under the Dutch law, all marriages under the age of sixteen are deemed unlawful. It was argued that Mansoor Adabi was not domiciled in Singapore, and hence could not assert his rights as Maria Hertogh's husband based on the colony's laws pertaining to Muslim affairs.⁸⁴ The Court's decision in declaring the marriage invalid was a critical turning point in Mansoor Adabi's career. He resigned from his post as a trainee teacher and became engaged in politics, social activism and legal reform.

Yet no measures were undertaken by the British to arrest the sentiments which English and Malay newspapers were capitalising upon at those crucial moments. Numerous commentaries portrayed the legal controversy as part of a wider and ongoing battle between Christianity and Islam.⁸⁵ The state of affairs worsened when Maria Hertogh was placed temporarily in the Roman Catholic Convent of the Good Shepherd. Images of the tearful girl kneeling in the church which was published in the *Singapore Standard* infuriated Muslims in Singapore and Malaya.⁸⁶ On the 4th December 1950, *Jamiyah* and the Singapore Muslim League called for a mass meeting to be held under leadership of Muslim elites in

⁸⁴ "In re Maria Huberdina Hertogh; Adrianu Petrus Hertogh and Anor. v. Amina binte Mohammed, Maria and Ors, December 2, 1950", *Malayan Law Journal*, 17, (1951), pp. 12-19.

⁸⁵ *Melayu Raya*, 2nd December, 1950; *Straits Echo*, 4th December, 1950; *Malaya Nanban*, 7th December, 1950 and *Utusan Melayu*, 7th December, 1950.

⁸⁶ *Singapore Standard*, 5th December, 1950.

the colony. A consensus was reached among the local Muslim leaders to the effect that Maria Hertogh had been brought up as a Muslim girl, and that her marriage was legal. Resolutions passed in this meeting further amplified the ubiquitous perception that Justice Brown's verdict was directed against the Islamic law of marriage.⁸⁷ Five days later, radical activists who were enraged by the court's decision formed the 'Nadra Action Committee' which incited Muslim crowds towards a holy struggle against the enemies of Islam. Despite that, the British Special Branch did not fully anticipate the imminent outbreak of mass violence. They did not register, as had the American Consul-General (William A. Langdon), 'the sharpening of the Catholic-Muslim issue in the affair' and the rapid escalation of 'religious fanaticism amongst stone-faced Malays.'⁸⁸

THE RIOTS

On 11th December, 1950, the court rejected an application for a stay of execution of the judgement which had been filed by Che Aminah and Mansoor Adabi. The first major riot in post-war Singapore began that day outside the High Court. Violence escalated after shots fired by Henry L. Velge, a Eurasian Volunteer Police Officer, wounded two Malays. Sporadic attacks developed quickly into widespread incidents of arson, robbery, murder and other forms of brutality, directed mainly at Europeans and Eurasians. Such acts of violence are examples of what Charles Tilly has termed 'reactive collective actions' which were undertaken by an enraged mass to defend a moral code. Devoid of a clear

⁸⁷ 'The History of the Hertogh Case', CO 537/7302. See also *The Malayan Nanban*, 7th December, 1950.

⁸⁸ 'William A. Langdon (American Consul General in Singapore) to Department of State, 15th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1550, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (NACPM).

political programme and organisation, such a movement would not be able to sustain a long-term struggle against an established polity.⁸⁹ In the short run, however, a dozen of troops and policemen who confronted the revolting masses proved to be ineffective. Malay police officers refused to comply with orders to arrest their co-religionists, whom they saw as pursuing a just cause against the non-Muslims.

On the second day of the riots, the police were given orders to shoot in the face of imminent danger. By then, mass violence had spread to other areas of Singapore. Kampong Glam, North Bridge Road, Tanjong Katong and Geylang Road were places where the riots had been most virulent. Five persons were reported killed, and over 100 wounded.⁹⁰ Three of those injured were reported to be Americans. Concerned about the possible spread of communist influence in the midst of the Korean War, the American Consul-General was called upon to submit detailed reports on the genesis and daily progress of the riots. During the height of violence, the American Secretary of State was informed that all bus services had been curtailed, 'radio warned whites and Eurasians to remain indoors. International air travellers still detained at airports. FS [Foreign Service] female employees, wives and children told to stay at home.'⁹¹ It was only upon the arrival and deployment of three battalions of Malay infantrymen under the command of Major-General Dermott Dunlop that order was largely restored. Helicopters were used to evacuate casualties and to take photographs of rioters for

⁸⁹ Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly, and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 50 and pp. 253-254.

⁹⁰ *Antara*, 13th December, 1950.

⁹¹ 'William A. Langdon (American Consul General in Singapore) to Department of State, 12th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1250, NACPM.

later identification.⁹² On the same day, Maria Hertogh was flown to the Netherlands.

In Britain, the riots became a topic of intense debate between politicians of opposing parties. Prominent leaders of the Conservative Party, such as Winston Churchill and David Gammans, demanded that Labour Ministers in the House of Commons provide detailed reports on the incident. Questions were raised as to whether such an unanticipated outbreak of violence was a product of communist influence, and fears were expressed about the possibility of the impending spread of a violent religious movement throughout Malaya. In response, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, James Griffiths, stated on 12th December that the riots had not been thoroughly quelled. Curfews that had been imposed since the first day of the riots would be extended for several more days. Griffiths dismissed the speculation that the riots were caused by a planned intervention by the Communists. Leaders of the Muslim community, Griffiths contended, were co-operating with the British to prevent the spread of violent movements that were precipitated by religious sentiments.⁹³

By noontime on 13th December, the riots had scaled down to sporadic attacks against the police. Eighteen people, including seven Europeans and Eurasians, were killed. 173 others were injured. Two buildings had been on burnt and 119 vehicles were damaged. The death toll arising from two days of rioting and police reprisals was said to be the highest when compared with other violent

⁹² See, 'Riot Enquiry Commission, Singapore, Summary of the Principal Incidents, as Assistant Superintendent of Police, 11-13 Dec 1950, with 86 photographs', Andrew Howat Frew Papers.

⁹³ *Hansard*, Vol. 482, 12th December, 1950 (London: H.M.S.O., 1951), pp. 979-982.

incidents on the island from the years 1945 to 1963.⁹⁴ Although a majority of the persons arrested were Malays and Indonesians, several Chinese members of a local secret society were also included in the list of suspects.⁹⁵

By any standards, the riots were defining moments for the British, as they had seriously undermined the legitimacy of the colonial administration in Singapore and the image of the Empire as whole. According to Charles Jeffries (a former Deputy Under-Secretary of State), unlike previous major disturbances in Aden (1947), in the Gold Coast (1948) and in Nigeria (1949), the Maria Hertogh riots was particularly significant, as they had exposed the weaknesses of a central pillar of British colonialism: the police force.⁹⁶ The Singapore Governor described the two smouldering days as 'an outbreak of violence unparalleled in the peacetime history of this centre of peaceful living and commerce.'⁹⁷ The probable repercussions of the riots were even more worrying. The internal security of Malaya as whole was placed under severe strain in the midst of an ongoing battle against the spread of Communism in Malaya. Within the larger Muslim world, the riots received widespread coverage and negative responses in a plethora of newspapers and periodicals. There was a plausible fear that diplomatic relations between Britain and the newly independent Muslim countries, such as Pakistan and Indonesia would be jeopardised.⁹⁸ Most crucial of all, for Muslims in Malaya, the riots 'illustrated the ways in which Islam could be mobilised to articulate

⁹⁴ Richard Clutterbuck, *Riot and Revolution in Singapore and Malaya, 1945-1963* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 73.

⁹⁵ 'Riots: Singapore; Report of Commission of Enquiry: Leach Report (1951)', CO 537/7248.

⁹⁶ Charles Jeffries, *The Colonial Police* (London: Max Parrish, 1952), p. 203.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report – State of Singapore: 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1951), p. 17.

⁹⁸ *Majlis*, 17th December, 1950 and Anthony J. Stockwell, "British Imperial Policy and Decolonization in Malaya, 1942-1952", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies*, 13, 1, (1984), p. 81.

general anti-colonial sentiments.’⁹⁹ In point of fact, the quelling of the violence did not end the struggle to restore Maria Hertogh to her rightful husband and to Islam. Appeals against the court’s decision were still underway, and there were heightened efforts towards gaining the support of Muslims locally and globally.¹⁰⁰

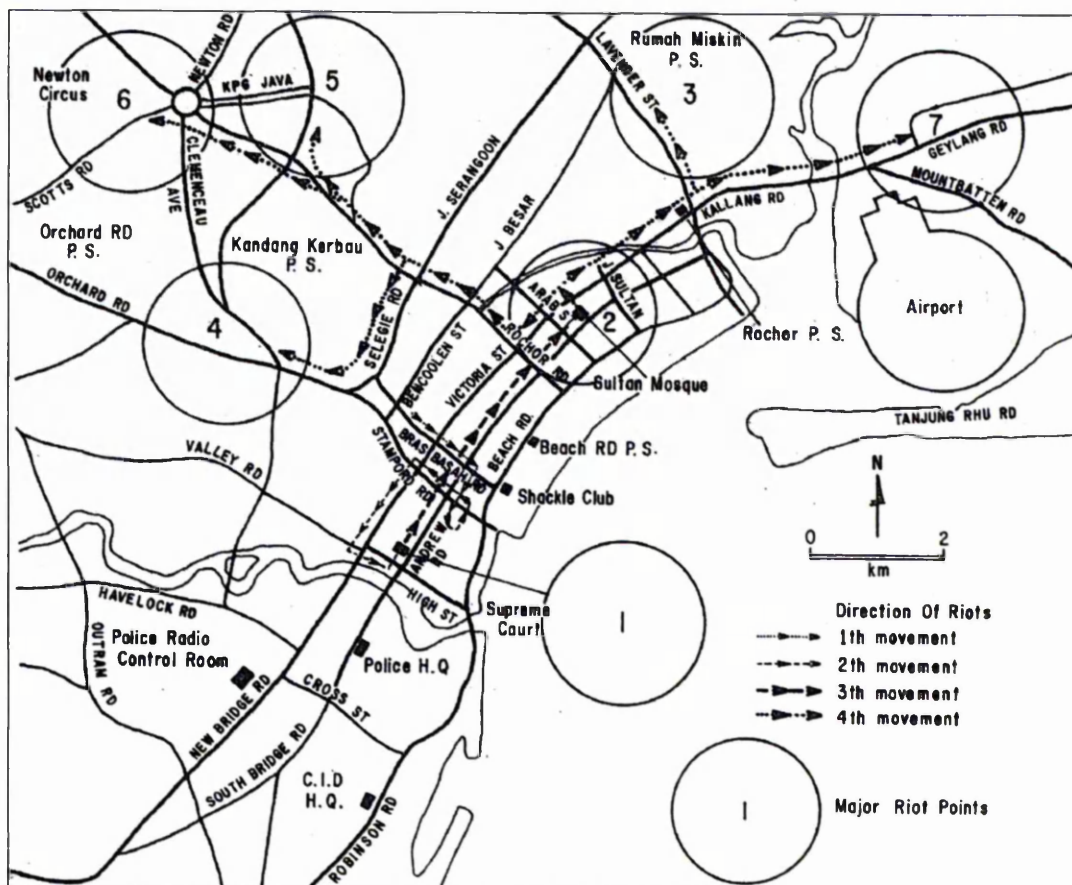
Whilst the riots was reminiscent to the Sepoy Mutiny in 1915, in that Muslims were the main perpetrators of violence towards Europeans and Eurasians in Singapore, there was, however, no turning back to the draconian measures that were undertaken during the high noon of the Empire.¹⁰¹ Rather, the British were well aware that a more complex and volatile environment lay before them. All counter-measures therefore had to be implemented with the utmost discretion so as to minimize unwarranted reactions from the local and global Muslim communities. Jürgen Osterhammel was not far off the mark in observing that colonial states in the post-World War Two period ‘reacted nervously and harshly to every stirring of opposition. Its guiding principle was never to let the initiative be snatched away and never to lose face. The state always had to have the last word; every provocation was to be punished with retaliation.’¹⁰² It is to British strategies in the aftermath of the riots and their far-reaching ramifications to which we now turn.

⁹⁹ Timothy N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 337.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 12, December 1950’, CO 825/82/3.

¹⁰¹ Twenty-two mutineers were shot in public and many others were banished or relocated to Africa. See R.W.E. Harper and Harry Miller, *Singapore Mutiny* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984).

¹⁰² Jürgen Osterhammel, *Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (trans. by Shelley L. Frisch) (Princeton: M. Wiener, 1996), p. 59.



Development of Riots on 11th December, 1950

Source: CO 537/7245



Vehicles burning and fire fighters at work during the height of the riots
Source: National Archives of Singapore

CHAPTER 3

Proscription

The purpose of this chapter is to narrate and analyse the complexities of British attempts at proscribing persons responsible for the riots and potential instigators from causing further violence. Four key antagonists were identified as the British became aware of the causes of the riots. Foremost in this respect were newspapers, which were looked upon as vehicles for the communication of dissent and anti-British propaganda. Also factored into the equation were ideologues that had incited hatred and violence. Third, the British sought to proscribe opportunists who saw the riots as a means to pursue their criminal as well as anti-colonial ends. More subtle and yet equally dangerous were the rumour-mongers who were bent upon aggravating the already tensed situation. All of these elements were of equal concern to the British and the tactics employed to cripple their agency were seven-fold: curfews, raids, arrests, routine checks, the issuing of public warnings, the introduction and enforcement of legal regulations and the sentencing of convicted criminals.

- **INSTILLING FEAR**

Arrests, raids and curfews were three tactics which the British employed from the worse days of the riots. The aim was to instil fear into the hearts and minds of the enemies of the colonial state in order to prevent further violence. 'Fear', as Corey Robin brilliantly puts it, 'ensures that those with power maintain

it, and prevents those without power from doing much, if anything, to get it.'¹⁰³ For the colonial state, fear was a political tool to diminish all forms of violent opposition and to regain agency in the aftermath of the riots. Such tactics, however, were not without contradictions and negative consequences. Among the ordinary citizens of Singapore, curfews were seen as relics of the Japanese Occupation. A majority of the populace were thus averse to having to stay indoors, as this had a great impact upon their livelihood. Hospital staff, for example, had to work for over sixteen hours each day because doctors and nurses on the night shift were unable to report for duty.¹⁰⁴ In fact, the British government had avoided the enforcement of curfews in previous years as it was looked upon as detrimental to the economy and the day-to-day lives of its subjects. The Maria Hertogh riots were a watershed in that they compelled the British to impose the first among a series of dusk-to-dawn curfews in post-war Singapore.¹⁰⁵

At noontime on 13th December, 1950, soldiers of the British army roamed the streets and rounded up potential suspects. The police force had been issued with search warrants allowing them to enter private dwellings. Adult males in selected *kampongs* were systematically coerced to assemble in open fields to a point that it recalled the painful memories of 'Operation Sook Ching'; the mass screening of Chinese in the early days of the Japanese Occupation in 1942.¹⁰⁶ The police ensured that all informers wore masks in order to hide their identities.

¹⁰³ Corey Robin, *Fear: The History of a Political Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 162.

¹⁰⁴ "Minutes of Proceedings of the Municipal Commissioners of the Town of Singapore at an Ordinary Meeting held on Friday, 29th December, 1950 (I-92/50)", in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the City Council of Singapore, 1950* (Singapore: The Council, 1951).

¹⁰⁵ Chan Kwee Sung, *One More Story To Tell: Memories of Singapore: 1930s-1980s* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2005), p. 102.

¹⁰⁶ Victor Seah Tiong Hin, *A Life Worth Reliving* (Singapore: T.H. Seah, 2002), p. 132.

Bruises, burn marks and possession of fuel were taken as tell-tale signs of direct involvement in the riots. All in all, more than five hundred persons were detained and interrogated from the first day of the riots. A majority of those arrested were Muslims ranging from the age of fifteen to forty years old. A dozen Chinese gangsters who joined the fray were also rounded up. Those detained were rigorously interrogated and persons who resisted arrest were subjected to physical punishment. Reporters observed that the areas around the Sultan Mosque, North Bridge Road and Geylang seemed like miniature war zones, as shops were closed and burnt cars littered the roads. In short, the municipal area of the island was 'dead'. The *Singapore Standard* warned that the riots might escalate into an 'orgy of indiscriminate slaughter' of not only Europeans and Christians, but also Chinese and Indians.¹⁰⁷ This was a somewhat extreme appreciation of the state of affairs but a grain of truth was to be found. Sporadic violence was far from over.

Vehicles were continuously vandalised and men were often seen armed with *parangs* and sticks. A group of youths had taken up positions on the upper floor of shophouses to throw bottles and stones. Two police cars were attacked by rioters at Jalan Sultan and North Bridge Road. Other forms of criminal acts were also reported at Orchard Road, Bukit Timah Road, Serangoon Road and Aljunied Road. The scale of damage to public and private property was considerable. The police and military responded by firing warning shots at the perpetrators. Armoured cars of the 13/18 Hussars continued to patrol the streets and were stationed at places where the worst rioting had taken place. A daylight curfew was

¹⁰⁷ *Singapore Standard*, 13th December, 1950.

imposed over the whole island. In the Geylang district, the curfew was imposed until as late as ten in the morning.¹⁰⁸

Upon obtaining the permission of the Chief *Kathi* of Singapore, Haji Ali bin Haji Mohd Said, the police went about inspecting the Sultan Mosque. Malay detectives were also deployed to monitor and perform bodily checks upon all worshippers who entered and left the mosque. A rifle, ammunition, steel spikes, bottles and large stones were found. A young Javanese man, who was suspected to have joined the rioters, was taken in for questioning.¹⁰⁹ Muslim leaders in the colony were apparently shocked by the police findings. An appeal by Mohamed Javad [M.J.] Namazie (the Joint Secretary of the Muslim Advisory Board) was broadcast via radio, calling on Muslims to put an end to the exploitation of sacred places for disgraceful purposes. Having proclaimed his support for the British to proscribe known suspects and guilty persons, Dato Onn bin Jaafar took on the risky task of dissuading Muslims in areas of Singapore where antagonism towards the Europeans and Eurasians was still evident.¹¹⁰ Such political posturing by the fifty-five-year-old President of UMNO contributed to the decline in popular support and the emergence of widespread criticism of his leadership.

On 14th December, parts of the city witnessed their third curfew, which extended from six or seven in the afternoon till six in the following morning. At certain localities, curfews were extended till noon.¹¹¹ In areas where curfews had been lifted, members of the public were allowed to roam around ravaged areas,

¹⁰⁸ *The Singapore Free Press*, 13th December, 1950.

¹⁰⁹ *Singapore Standard*, 14th December, 1950 and *The Straits Times*, 14th December, 1950.

¹¹⁰ 'Malaya: Monthly Political Intelligence Report, 28th December, 1950', CO 825/82/3.

¹¹¹ 'Commonwealth Relations Office to UK High Commissioners (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan and Ceylon, 14th December, 1950', FO 371/84677.

much to their own peril. Altogether, sixty-six persons were arrested for breach of curfew, and 104 were detained under the Emergency Regulations during screening operations throughout the colony. The number of persons arrested since the riots began shot up to 884, of whom forty-two were released. Those who were arrested were largely Malays, Indonesians and Indian Muslims.¹¹² Only two serious incidents which involved Malay and European casualties were reported on 14th December. Non-Muslims, particularly the Europeans and Eurasians, were observed to be in constant fear of groups of Malay youths who gathered on the fringes of villages from Jalan Eunos to Changi Road. In reaction to this, the British deployed hundreds of military personnel to restore order and public confidence.¹¹³ Together with the Commissioner of Police, R.C.B. Wiltshire, and military escorts, the Singapore Governor toured various areas that had been affected by the riots.¹¹⁴ On the same day, a full list of the names of the fourteen people who had died in the riots and 156 others who had been injured was published in *The Straits Times*.¹¹⁵

Meanwhile, rumours of fresh riots arising from police atrocities were spreading in the colony. Although based on false information, such rumours were potent in a society where word of mouth was the most common mode of disseminating news. In his study of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Paul R. Brass has rightly pointed out that rumours 'are usually attributed, like riots themselves to the credulity of the masses, already inflamed by prejudices against another group and ready to gather in large crowds to take revenge for the actions falsely

¹¹² *The Singapore Free Press*, 15th December, 1950.

¹¹³ *The Straits Times*, 15th December, 1950.

¹¹⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 15th December, 1950.

¹¹⁵ *The Straits Times*, 14th December, 1950.

attributed to that group or for real, but trivial. Actions enlarged upon in the rumour process.¹¹⁶ As seen in an earlier chapter, the Muslims of Singapore had been a close-knit community which relied on personal, face-to-face social connections and oral communication. All that was needed was a mere rumour to set the wounded community of faith onto another rampage.

To inhibit this growing phenomenon, Wilfred F. Blythe, the Singapore Colonial Secretary, warned against rumour-mongering over Radio Malaya. He maintained that stories of serious incidents occurring in various parts of the island were complete fabrications and that persons found guilty of manufacturing rumours would be duly prosecuted. The Singapore Colonial Secretary further assured the general public that forty-five armed vehicles would be touring the island to ensure that all untoward incidents would be dealt with swiftly.¹¹⁷ Still, some parts of the island, namely Chancery Lane and Holland Road, were plagued by episodes of stone-throwing directed at Europeans. One of the victims quickly reported the incident to the police, but many others saw the futility of such actions. On the night of 15th December, peddlers and prostitutes, whose income was severely affected by the curfews, were caught loitering in the back alleys of Selegie Road, Jalan Besar, Rochore Road and Desker Road. They were warned by the police to stay indoors. Selegie Road, which was one of the most dangerous spots during the riots, was kept under close surveillance.¹¹⁸

By 16th December, the Singapore Police had arrested another group of 187 persons for violation of the curfew order. Seventy-six others were detained under

¹¹⁶ Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, p. 124.

¹¹⁷ *The Singapore Free Press*, 15th December, 1950.

¹¹⁸ *The Straits Times*, 15th December, 1950.

the Emergency Regulations. As part of its deterrent measures, the government revealed publicly that the number of people arrested had totalled up to 1,107.¹¹⁹ Sixty-one persons were arrested on the following day, and 500 others were placed under detention.¹²⁰ A Special Branch report noted that the spread of misinformation regarding the facts of the Maria Hertogh case was still rampant. To address this, George G. Thompson, the Public Relations Secretary, arranged for a radio broadcast entitled 'Police and the People' appealing, yet again, against the spreading of rumours. In a melodramatic way, Thompson concluded his broadcast by mentioning that: 'There is today and tomorrow whose problems must be faced by us all, and they must be faced pending a judgment on the past....We do not wish to ask, what in any case is impossible that the events of the past should be forgotten but to appeal that now on every side, the task must be taken up of building confidence and security again.'¹²¹ By 17th December, curfews were limited to certain areas, extending only from eight at night till five in the morning.¹²²

From time to time, the British had to deal with various challenges in enforcing curfews in Singapore. Most salient were persons who were ignorant of the riots. The *Singapore Free Press*, for example, related a humorous story which was illustrative of the predicament faced by Malay sailors and fishermen in Singapore at that time. A man named Said, who worked on a small boat, was totally oblivious of the riots, as he did not own a radio. When he came ashore, none of his relatives had informed him of the events that had unfolded. Said thus

¹¹⁹ *The Singapore Free Press*, 16th December, 1950.

¹²⁰ Malcolm Macdonald to Ernest Bevin, 2nd March, 1951.

¹²¹ 'Statement by George G. Thomson, Public Relations Secretary (Singapore), 22nd February, 1951', CO 953/10/1, pp. 11-12.

¹²² *The Straits Times*, 18th December, 1950.

left home in the late afternoon in search of entertainment only to be shocked at finding himself arrested by Gurkha policemen. After much difficulty, Said was released and sent back to his boat.¹²³ Apart from that, there were many others who had deliberately flouted the curfew orders. A European lawyer, M.H. MacDougal, was caught walking alone during the restricted hours. When asked by police to produce his identification card, the lawyer stated that he knew his rights and resisted arrest. He was brought to the police station and fined \$10.¹²⁴ Favouritism towards Europeans was also said to have been practised by high-ranking officials in the colony during this period. O.O. Salvesen, a Volunteer Special Constable, recounted an incident at Orchard Road police station when a European couple and six Asian men were arrested for breaking curfew and for their failure to produce identity cards. Whilst the six men were put behind bars, the European couple was subsequently released via the intervention of Sir Charles Murray Aynsley, the Chief Justice of Singapore. Several officers at the station who witnessed the incident saw it as an instance of British favouritism towards all Caucasians.¹²⁵ In response to this accusation, Aynsley noted that: 'I did not convey by word or implication that I wanted their release.'¹²⁶

Yet curfew-breaking was the least of the problems faced by the British. A major obstacle which had to be overcome was the reluctance on the part of the Malay police officers to arrest Muslim suspects which, to them, was a form of betrayal towards their co-religionists. A British colonial officer observed a drastic drop 'in the morale of the Malay members of the Police Force who are 100%

¹²³ *The Singapore Free Press*, 18th December, 1950.

¹²⁴ *The Singapore Free Press*, 20th December, 1950.

¹²⁵ *The Singapore Free Press*, 7th March, 1951.

¹²⁶ 'Singapore Riots Inquiry: A Study in Responsible Government', RG 59, 746F.00/2-1951 NACPM.

sympathetic to the Muslim cause, and whose intimacy with the resentful members of the Muslim community renders them unreliable in the performance of any duties which bring them into conflict with Muslims over a religious issue.'¹²⁷

On the following day, the western areas of the island were freed from curfew. The names and identity card numbers of all curfew breakers had been recorded, and they would be charged in court if caught for a second time. None had broken the curfew twice.¹²⁸ On 19th December, the curfew orders were completely lifted. Muslims were still subjected to routine bodily checks, and other members of the public were required to produce their identity cards upon encountering with the police. With the exception of the burning of a bus by several Chinese youths on the outskirts of the city, no other incidences of violence were reported.¹²⁹

Within governmental circles, plans were laid for the arrest of Muslim leaders who were responsible for inciting the Muslim masses to rise against the colonial state. A long list of names was brought forth by the Special Branch, which included ideologues who delivered polemical speeches in the heat of the Maria Hertogh legal case. The British were mindful that arresting anyone who was too influential would tilt the balance towards Muslim radicalism and, in turn, precipitate yet another wave of riots. Upon careful consideration, six influential Muslims were singled out. An extensive exposition of the biographies of these men is crucial for an understanding of British moves to detain them.

¹²⁷ Lionel Griffith-Jones, *That's My Lot: An Anecdotal Autobiography of a British Ex-Singapore Colonial* (New York: Vantage Press, 1984), p. 138.

¹²⁸ *The Straits Times*, 18th December, 1950.

¹²⁹ 'William R. Langdon to Department of State, 20th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2050, NACPM.

• IDEOLOGUES AND PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE

Topping the list was forty-two year old Abdul Mohammed Abdul Karim Ghani, more commonly known as 'Karim Ghani'. Born in Madras and educated in Ceylon, Karim Ghani grew up in Rangoon, where he became a Parliamentary Secretary under Ba Maw. In the course of the Second World War, Karim Ghani migrated to Japanese-occupied Malaya and was appointed as a Propaganda Minister of a virtual Indian alternative government led by Subhas Chandra Bose. He was imprisoned upon the British reoccupation of Malaya but was later released without being tried. In March 1946, he was diagnosed with mental disorder and spent the next two months in an asylum. Following his release, Karim Ghani pioneered the publication of several newspapers and periodicals in Penang and Singapore, all of which were short-lived. By September 1949, he became the General Manager of the Muslim Publishing House, the Chief Editor of a Tamil daily newspaper, the *Malaya Nanban*, and editor of an English weekly tabloid, *Dawn*. With the support of the South Indian Muslim community, he was simultaneously elected President of the Muslim League of Singapore and President of the All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society. Concurrently, he had campaigned for the establishment of a Muslim political party.¹³⁰ The onset of the Maria Hertogh controversy gave Karim Ghani a fine opportunity to pursue his political goals. Hence, on 17th November 1950, Karim Ghani took over the management of the legal case from another Indian Muslim, M.A. Majid. Referring to himself as an *Imam* (Leader) of a Holy War against the unbelievers, Karim Ghani gained prominence through his charismatic speeches and erudite

¹³⁰ *Straits Times*, 31st December, 1947.

commentaries in newspapers. Judged by the present-day academic standards, he could have been described as a 'Radical Islamist'.¹³¹

It is, therefore, all the more remarkable that Karim Ghani did not call for violence against non-Muslims in the colony. In fact, he was instrumental in deterring his co-religionists from engaging in criminal activities during the riots. He urged Muslims in Singapore to direct their resources towards the pursuit of a legal struggle to restore Maria Hertogh in the fold of Che Aminah and Mansoor Adabi. In a speech delivered on 14th December at Kuala Lumpur, Karim Ghani revealed his intentions of obtaining the support of all Muslim countries at the forthcoming World Muslim Congress in Karachi. The Indonesian Government would be asked to sever its diplomatic relations with the Netherlands as a symbol of protest against Dutch involvement in the legal tussle.¹³² A few days later, a mass meeting was held in Singapore to launch his Muslim political party. Prior to his arrest, Karim Ghani had laid plans for a trip to Jakarta in the hope of locating Maria Hertogh's maternal uncle, Soewaldi Hunter. The main intent was to obtain the adoption agreement between Che Aminah and Adeline Hertogh as evidence for the upcoming appeal in the Singapore High Court.¹³³ Described by the British as 'neither the most sinister nor the most important, but he has been a figurehead and a tool', Karim Ghani's arrest served as merely a warning to deter other aspiring fanatics.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Maha Azzam, "Islamist Attitudes to the Current World Order", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 4, 2, (1993), p. 247 and John T. Sidel, *The Islamist Threat in Southeast Asia: A Reassessment* (Washington: East-West Center Washington, 2007), pp. 1-57.

¹³² *Dawn*, 17th December, 1950, 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797 and 'Review of Islamic Affairs- 4th Quarter 1950', FO 371/91250.

¹³³ *Pedoman*, 20th December, 1950.

¹³⁴ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

The British were however puzzled by the roles of thirty-seven-year-old Dr Burhanuddin bin Mohammed Nur (more commonly known as Burhanuddin Al-Helmy) and thirty-two-year-old Mohammed Taha bin Kalu. At the same time, they had strong suspicions that the two men were the chief architects behind Karim Ghani's manoeuvres. 'It is not unreasonable to suggest that Dr Burhanuddin and Taha Kalu may have had in mind Karim Ghani's experiences as a minister in the revolutionary Indian Independence Government of the occupation period when they decided to hitch their wagon to his star.'¹³⁵ Both men were co-founders of the defunct MNP. Born in Perak and of Sumatran descent, Burhanuddin was a homeopathy practitioner whose collaboration with the Japanese, leftist leanings and close contacts with the Communists had resulted to several bouts of imprisonment.¹³⁶ He served as the President of the MNP in 1947 and was appointed as its general adviser from 1948 until party's dissolution in 1949. In August 1950, Burhanuddin became one of the founders and the editor of the *Melayu Raya* newspaper. Mohammed Taha Kalu, an Indian Muslim born in Malacca, was a lawyer's clerk who had led a branch of the MNP in Singapore. Both men were known for their Pan-Indonesian sympathies and for campaigning for the independence of Malaya. The outbreak of the riots together with the arrests of hundreds of Muslims and persistent warnings by the Special Branch had still not broken the radical spirits of these men. Merely two days after the riots, Taha Kalu, Karim Ghani and Mansoor Adabi visited Kuala Lumpur for a meeting with legal advisers.¹³⁷ This was followed by a planned tour of major villages and towns in north Malaya to obtain the support of Muslims of all ages and affiliations in

¹³⁵ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

¹³⁶ For a detailed biography of Burhanuddin Al-Helmy, see Kamarudin Jaffar, *Dr. Burhanuddin Al Helmy: Pemikiran dan Perjuangan* (Kuala Lumpur: Ikdas, 2000).

¹³⁷ *Utusan Melayu*, 15th January, 1951.

regard to the Maria Hertogh legal struggle. In tandem with this, Dr Burhanuddin was appointed the new editor of *Dawn*, a radical newspaper, in place of Karim Ghani. From the perspective of the Special Branch, the arrests of Dr Burhanuddin and Taha Kalu were deemed necessary, for they were regarded as potential threats to the restoration of peace in Singapore. Indeed, the MNP had hoped to capitalize on the anti-British sentiments in favour of a violent revolution which would overthrow the colonial regime. This was part of the *cita-cita perjuangan* (the hopes and aims of struggle) on the road to the creation of the union between Malaya, Singapore and Indonesia.¹³⁸

The three other potential detainees were somewhat representative of the sub-ethnic groupings within the Singapore Muslim community. Originating from a well-respected Arab Hadrami family, fifty-year-old Syed Ali Al-Attas was a businessman who was prominent within the Malay entertainment arena. He was also a member of the Malay Welfare Council and played an active role in garnering financial support for Che Aminah and Mansoor Adabi. Similar to Al-Attas, Mohammed Mustaza was a Malay businessman from Taiping, Perak. He had been a sympathizer of API, the proscribed youth organisation, and later became the President of *Pemuda Radikal Melayu* (PERAM, the Radical Malay Youths).¹³⁹ A British intelligence report described him as 'nothing more or less than an irresponsible firebrand.' Last on the list was Darus Shariff, a political activist who was thirty-five years of age. As a former President of the Singapore branch of the MNP and subsequently, the Secretary of the Singapore Malay Welfare Council, Darus Shariff was vocal in urging Muslims to rise against the

¹³⁸ Firdaus, *Radical Malay Politics: Its Origins and Early Development*, p. 117-118.

¹³⁹ 'Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal No. 2/1948, 31st January 1948', CO 537/3751.

tyranny of the colonial state. A champion of Malay communal concerns and economic rights, he shot to prominence upon the establishment of the Singapore Branch of UMNO on December 1951.¹⁴⁰

At three o'clock on a Monday morning of 18th December, 1950, officers from the Special Branch raided the houses of the six men, detaining them and seizing all documents related to their activism. No resistance was encountered, and it was known that Karim Ghani had anticipated his arrest. The men were detained under Emergency Regulation 20 which gave the Singapore Colonial Secretary the authority to issue detention orders 'when it appears to him to be necessary or expedient for securing the public safety or for the maintenance of public order.'¹⁴¹ The arrests, nevertheless, did not see the end of Karim Ghani's resistance against the colonial regime. On the evening of his detention, Karim Ghani sent a petition to the Singapore Governor on behalf of the five men who had been arrested along with him. He contended that the detention orders were unjustifiable and protested against being imprisoned with suspected communists.¹⁴² Upon rigorous interrogation, the detainees were transferred from a high-security prison on St. John's Island to a detention centre at Pulau Belakang Mati.

The British were expecting violent protests from Muslims in the colony. To the contrary, unlike the radical protesters in Malaya, Indonesia and Pakistan, Muslims in Singapore took on a non-militant approach. An open letter signed by

¹⁴⁰ *Utusan Melayu*, 31st December, 1951.

¹⁴¹ 'Singapore Riots, December 11th-12th, 1950', CO 537/7302. See *Utusan Melayu*, 19th December, 1950.

¹⁴² 'Report of Visit to St. John's Island on 31st December, 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

more than 100 sympathisers of Karim Ghani was sent to *Jamiyah* and the Singapore Muslim League, urging the two organisations to 'step up the appeal for the release of those unfortunate leaders, who evidently as leaders are suspected in a sense quite contrary to their public spiritedness.'¹⁴³ A monthly political report captures vividly the general sentiments among Muslims in Singapore at that point in time:

Singapore – The Arrests on Detention Orders of Karim Ghani, Dr Burhanuddin, Taha Kalu and three other disciples on December 18th, has produced remarkably little reaction. The strong Military show of force and the earlier arrest of over 300 suspects in screening raids have undoubtedly had a sobering effect, but even so the signs of protest have not been such as to indicate that Karim Ghani had ever achieved a fanatical following. Muslim leaders who mistrusted Karim Ghani and were glad to see him removed, are now amongst those who are appealing for his release – but this is a natural manoeuvre.¹⁴⁴

Consecutively, more than 566 persons were detained and 189 released after rigorous interrogation. Detention Orders were issued for another list of 171 persons.¹⁴⁵ As the waves of arrests intensified, the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) announced the creation of the Riots Investigation Unit which consisted of twenty-nine officers and detectives. The task of the Riots Investigation Unit was to collate information on the causes of the riots. Such information, as will be seen later, assisted in the work of the Commission of Enquiry. To address the drain on manpower within the police force due to the establishment of the Riot Investigation Unit, arrests and detentions were

¹⁴³ 'Open Letter to the Singapore Muslim League and *Jamiyah*, 29th December, 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

¹⁴⁴ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

¹⁴⁵ 'Singapore Situation Report for December, 1950', CO 717/199/5.

intensified to discourage lawlessness.¹⁴⁶ The CID appealed to the general public to provide any pictures or reports pertaining to the riots. It was observed that Malays and Indians were, by and large, unforthcoming in providing vital information for the fear of implicating their families and friends. Another possible reason could have been the climate of distrust that had developed within the Muslim community towards the colonial government as a consequence of the arrests of innocent persons. Thus far, 'information came mostly from Europeans and Eurasians and the response from other nationalities was reported to be almost nil.'¹⁴⁷ The police were, however, on full alert for unexpected provocations by Malay youths.¹⁴⁸

The role of the press was at the centre of a debate in the Singapore Legislative Council on 19th December, 1950. Tan Chye Cheng, a member of the Progressive Party, rebuked the press for its 'gross irresponsibility' and called for harsher measures by the government to address misrepresentations of the Maria Hertogh case.¹⁴⁹ In an effort to mitigate sensational press descriptions of the riots and the legal case, the Public Relations Secretary arranged for a conference with the editors of all Singapore-based newspapers at Government House. It was reported that the vernacular newspapers, such as *Utusan Melayu* and *Malayan Nanban*, has increased in sales by 100 per cent in the days immediately after the riots. The tabloid *Dawn*, which was the mouthpiece of Karim Ghani, had ceased publication following the editor's arrest. Even so, the Singapore Governor

¹⁴⁶ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 16th October, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B307.

¹⁴⁷ *The Straits Times*, 19th December, 1950.

¹⁴⁸ *The Straits Times*, 20th December, 1950.

¹⁴⁹ *The Straits Budget*, 21st December, 1950. See also, *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th December, 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B470.

appealed to the press for their fullest co-operation in avoiding reports that could further invigorate Muslim sentiments. Publications of pictures and damaging captions were forbidden. At another conference with editors of several newspapers that were based outside Singapore, Gimson repeated similar appeals to not report on the challenges faced by Maria Hertogh in the Netherlands.¹⁵⁰ With the exception of the *Melayu Raya*, all other newspapers complied with governmental appeals and avoided polemics in their treatment of the legal controversy. *Utusan Melayu* featured updates on the Maria Hertogh case in its front page editorials for more than a week following the riots but maintained, in British perspective, 'objective reporting'. Although the *Utusan Melayu* editorials continually asserted that Muslims had been offended by the Government's lack of reverence for their religion and laws, its politics was focused upon widening the differences between the leadership of UMNO and its youth bodies over the outbreak of the riots. Dato Onn was the main target of its vilification.¹⁵¹

The British had already anticipated resistance by *Melayu Raya* but were optimistic of a change in attitude arising from recent waves of arrests. In reverse, the founders and editors of *Melayu* were not swayed by the Governor's appeals. In his memoirs entitled *Malay Nationalism Before UMNO*, Mustapha Hussain recounts his meeting with Dr Burhanuddin Al-Helmy prior to the latter's arrest. Having been appointed as a trusted correspondent and distributor of the newspaper, Mustapha appealed for Dr Burhanuddin to steer clear of an impending crisis. 'We should do what *Utusan Melayu* is doing. Be cautious and not be seen to be involved.' Mustapha alerted Dr Burhanuddin to the presence Special Branch

¹⁵⁰ 'Statement by George G. Thomson, Public Relations Secretary (Singapore), 22nd February, 1951', CO 953/10/1, p. 11.

¹⁵¹ *Melayu Raya*, 21st December, 1950.

agents in the vicinity of newspaper's office and the possibility of the *Melayu Raya* being banned in Malaya. The response from Burhanuddin was sharp and decisive: 'This is a test of Malay faith.' The newspaper sustained its polemical stance. Mustapha was suspected to be an agent of the police and was abruptly replaced by a new correspondent.¹⁵² *Melayu Raya* went on to fuel anti-European sentiments and rebuked Muslim leaders for their cowardice. A challenge was posed to the *Utusan Melayu* 'to keep pace in satisfying the Malay public demand for rumours and gossip on the case.' One of the rumours suggested that premeditated attacks would be launched upon Christians during the end of the year Christmas celebrations.¹⁵³ Another letter of reminder was thus sent by the Public Relations Secretary to all newspapers to refrain from publishing photographs of Maria Hertogh. Informal meetings were also held between British officials and the editor of *Melayu Raya* through the intercession of Dato Onn. Yet all was in vain.¹⁵⁴ Repeated warnings by the Special Branch were ignored and a tough reprisal was underway.

Below the surface, it had become clear to the British that Indonesians in Singapore was one of the driving forces of the riots, as seen from the hundreds who were still in detention. A meeting between the Singapore Governor and the Consul-General of Indonesia was held towards the end of December to discuss the enforcement of the Aliens' Ordinance Act of 1940 upon Indonesian residents in

¹⁵² Mustapha Hussain, *Malay Nationalism Before UMNO: Memoirs of Mustapha Hussain* (trans.) (Kuala Lumpur: Utusan Publications and Distributors, 2005), pp. 369-370.

¹⁵³ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302. It is important to note here that copies of *Melayu Raya* from 10th-27th December, 1950 are missing from various archival collections in Singapore and Malaysia.

¹⁵⁴ 'Extract of Minutes of 21st Meeting held on 12th January 1951, at Kuala Lumpur by Joint Information and Propaganda Committee', CO 537/7302.

Singapore.¹⁵⁵ This meant that all Indonesian nationals would be required to register with the police and that they would be compelled to update their residential addresses in Singapore on a regular basis. The Consul-General of Indonesia welcomed the proposal, as his role was to 'keep a register of his nationals and he thinks that Singapore Government action might save him a considerable amount of labour.'¹⁵⁶ The Colonial Office was initially positive towards this development. Similarly, Malcolm Macdonald felt that the Malays in Singapore were likely to be preyed upon if they were exposed to the ploys of radical Indonesian ideologues.¹⁵⁷ But the British were faced with strained relations with President Sukarno as a result of the Maria Hertogh case, and there were a series of administrative difficulties involved in differentiating the 'Indonesians' from the 'Malayans'. The proposal was later dropped and never implemented.¹⁵⁸

• THE USE AND ABUSE OF LAW

By January 1951, the Riots Investigation Unit had completed its report and distributed copies of the document to all leading newspapers in the colony. Such a policy of deliberate disclosure was part of British strategy to counter damaging rumours that were still in circulation. The CID identified five impulses that had resulted to the outbreak of violence, the first of which was the personal aspiration of Karim Ghani. This was coupled with Malayan and Indonesian nationalism, intertwined with anti-Dutch antagonisms. The next cause identified was local

¹⁵⁵ *Registration of Aliens Ordinance, 1940* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1940).

¹⁵⁶ 'Franklin Gimson to Djakarta, 30th December, 1950', CO 537/7302.

¹⁵⁷ 'Extract of Minutes of Malaya/Borneo Governors' Conference, 15th January, 1952', CO 1022/429.

¹⁵⁸ 'Franklin Gimson to Foreign Office, 25th February, 1951', CO 537/7302 and 'Transcription of Interview with Mr. Roderick Maclean, 1st September, 1983', *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000301), p. 30.

hooliganism manifested in the form of secret societies. Related to this was the involvement of persons belonging to cults which harboured fanatical interpretations of Islam that had propelled youths to take up arms in the streets. The CID report discounted the role of communists as the prime movers behind the riots. Members of the Malayan Communist Party seemed 'to have been taken by surprise. It is possible that MCP elements took the opportunity of staging a small number of arson incidents, but if so their share in the whole riot was insignificant.' Aside from that, the CID emphasized that the placing of Maria Hertogh in the Roman Catholic Convent and the failures of the Malay police had made the situation far more dangerous than it would have been otherwise.¹⁵⁹ The definite facts of the report were that persons who were arrested before 20th December 1950 had been cross-examined and justice had already been meted out.¹⁶⁰ Newspapers in the colony were, however, ambivalent towards what was perceived as a shallow yet notable effort by the colonial government. *The Straits Times* praised the CID Riot Investigation Unit and the police force in general for their ability to produce a report amidst other urgent duties. Nonetheless, the editorial suggested that a more comprehensive investigation be conducted 'for this first effort tells very little and answers none of the questions that are being asked.'¹⁶¹

On 8th January 1951, in the midst of continued protests by various branches of UMNO in Malaya with regards to the arrest of the six Muslim leaders, the Government made a bold move by detaining John Eber, one of the lawyers representing Che Aminah.¹⁶² He was interned along with Abdul Samad Ismail (the

¹⁵⁹ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797.

¹⁶⁰ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

¹⁶¹ *The Singapore Free Press*, 2nd January, 1951.

¹⁶² *Majlis*, 4th January, 1951.

Utusan Melayu Editor), Devan Nair (Union Leader), and thirty other undergraduates and teachers for their active involvement in a clandestine group called the Anti-British League. The arrests were criticised by leftist-oriented activists and Muslim elites in the colony. Rumours had it that Eber and Samad's arrests were linked to their involvement in the Maria Hertogh legal case. The British denied these wild speculations and clarified that the movements and activities of all those arrested had been monitored for many months and that it had been firmly established that they were in cahoots with the Communists.¹⁶³

This incident was met with riots launched by a crowd of one hundred Malays, Indonesians and Pakistanis at the junction of Arab Street and Beach Road. A patrol car was attacked and the police opened fire on the rioters, who were armed with bottles and stones. By midnight of 10th January 1951, the chaos was over.¹⁶⁴ One man was severely wounded, and many who had sustained injuries were arrested. Several dozens were said to have escaped from police action by hiding in nearby houses and shops. The police denied any connection between this short episode of violence and the arrests of communists or the Maria Hertogh controversy.¹⁶⁵ The flood of arrests and raids continued unabated and random searches of suspected mobsters and fanatics became normal occurrences. It was reported that fourteen people were detained under the Emergency Regulations. A CID spokesman mentioned that twelve among those under police

¹⁶³ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797, *Utusan Melayu*, 9th January, 1951 and *Singapore Standard*, 9th January, 1951.

¹⁶⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 10th January, 1951.

¹⁶⁵ *Antara*, 11th January, 1951.

custody were Malays and Indonesians who took part in the December 1950 riots.¹⁶⁶

To fortify the government's ability to quell future outbreaks of rioting, the Singapore Colonial Secretary announced the amendment of the Emergency Regulations during the Legislative Council Meeting on 16th January. The new bill stated that island-wide curfews could be imposed by any police division. From the experience of the December 1950 riots, it was determined that a more advisable move was to apply the curfew throughout the island, especially in the event of massive attacks against the civilian population.¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, newspaper editorials in Singapore refrained from registering their dissent towards the bill. Extensive coverage was given to the punishment meted out to rioters who had been detained, and such reports are particularly useful in unravelling the identities (age, ethnicity and occupations) of what George Rudé has described as the 'faces of the crowd' in the worst days of the Maria Hertogh riots.¹⁶⁸ Contrary to British suspicions that the rioters were largely criminals from working class backgrounds, the trials clearly demonstrated that men of white-collar occupations, and even employees of the colonial administration, were an integral part of the mass violence that broke out.

The first among the hundreds of men who were convicted was a 24-year-old police constable, Yaakob bin Mohamed. Yaakob was initially charged with causing hurt and destructive mischief. Two witnesses, who were both police

¹⁶⁶ *The Singapore Free Press*, 11th January, 1951.

¹⁶⁷ *The Straits Times*, 17th January, 1951.

¹⁶⁸ George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848* (New York: Wiley, 1984).

detectives, claimed that the Malay constable had stopped their car during the riots in search of Europeans and Eurasians. Yaakob was allegedly among the rioters who were agitating for violence. Upon rigorous cross-examination, no clear evidence of Yaakob's direct role in an attack upon the two detectives was found. The charge was thus amended to involvement in an 'unlawful assembly' which meant that Yaakob was relieved of his post as a police officer and sentenced to six months in prison.¹⁶⁹ The policeman's fate was shared by a Javanese man, Senordin bin Ahmad, who was twenty-six years of age. He was charged with being a ringleader of an unruly crowd of forty Malays and Indian Muslims. One of the men led by Senordin was apprehended during the riots, yet was set free by their accomplices, who prevailed over the outnumbered policemen. Senordin was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. Eight Indonesians who were tried for 'unlawful assembly whose object was to cause hurt' were given a maximum of two years' imprisonment.¹⁷⁰ Another group of Malay youths, who had chased and injured three European sailors along Tanjong Pagar Road during the riots, were given similar sentences. A Malay fireman, Abdul Jabar bin Haji Abdul Rahman, who was wearing his uniform whilst setting fire to a car, was to serve seven months behind bars. Likewise, an Indian Muslim was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for shouting intimidating slogans and threats at Europeans at North Bridge Road.¹⁷¹

The general public was particularly informed of court trials relating to Father Octave Dupoirieux of the Cannossa Convent. In his testimony, Father

¹⁶⁹ *Utusan Melayu*, 18th January, 1951.

¹⁷⁰ *The Straits Times*, 20th January, 1951 and 'Riot Enquiry Commission, Singapore, Summary of the Principal Incidents, as Assistant Superintendent of Police, 11-13 Dec 1950, with 86 photographs', Andrew Howat Frew Papers.

¹⁷¹ *The Straits Times*, 1st-10th February, 1951.

Octave told the District Court that Inspector Bujang bin Tunggal had refused his appeal to enter the police station, despite his having been attacked by rioters.¹⁷² Bujang's defense lawyer argued that the inspector was executing the orders of his immediate superior, Inspector Ong, to the effect that he was to refuse to permit the entry of civilians into the police station in the wake of mass violence. After a protracted legal battle, Bujang was acquitted due to contradictory evidence laid against him.¹⁷³ Another case that gained widespread attention within the Muslim community was that of the nephew of Che Zaharah, the president of the Singapore Malay Women's Welfare Association. Zan bin Omar, twenty-years of age, was charged with rioting, along with several other Malay youths. Che Zaharah became one of the defence witnesses, but for a lost cause. Zan was sentenced to 18 months' imprisonment.¹⁷⁴

Indeed, 'justice is in the eyes of the beholder'.¹⁷⁵ Concerned lawyers and community leaders in Singapore declared that British judges had abused legal processes and bent the rules that governed the judiciary. Dozens of witnesses who testified against persons who were convicted did not actually appear in court. Many had concealed their identities for fear of reprisals.¹⁷⁶ To address the abuse of colonial laws, the Singapore Muslim League created a panel of Muslim lawyers to defend innocent Muslims who had been detained by the police and were subsequently charged in court.¹⁷⁷ Two court cases that were regarded as abuses of

¹⁷² *Utusan Melayu*, 19th April, 1951.

¹⁷³ "Bujang bin Tunggal v. Rex, August 15, 1951", *Malayan Law Journal*, 17, (1951), pp. 174-177 and *Utusan Melayu*, 16th August, 1951.

¹⁷⁴ *Straits Times*, 29th May, 1951.

¹⁷⁵ Elaine Walster and G. William Walster, "Equity and Social Justice", *Journal of Social Issues*, 31, 3, (1975), pp. 21-43.

¹⁷⁶ *The Straits Times*, 3rd February, 1951

¹⁷⁷ 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 8th February, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers and *Utusan Melayu*, 10th February, 1951.

justice were that of a Malay who was charged with being a 'Dancing Rioter'. Juraimi bin Radzi was purported to have 'danced wildly' with a cloth tied round his head.¹⁷⁸ A former senior assistant of the United States Information Service, Mohammed Abdul Samad, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for taking part in an unlawful assembly. The Chief Justice, Sir Charles Murray-Aynsley, held that Mohammed was 'a man of some intelligence and education. It was more serious for a man of his character to be in an unlawful assembly than it was for an ignorant man.' Mohammed's lawyer argued that there was a lack of crucial evidence to prove that he had harmed anyone. Rather, Mohammed was a mere passer-by when the rioting happened. The lawyer chided the Judge's decision as 'excessive'.¹⁷⁹ A Baweanese youth, Arshad bin Sinwan, was sentenced to a total of five years imprisonment by Justice M. Buttrose for taking part in an unlawful assembly that had ravaged a van belonging to a British company.

For many weeks thereafter, reports on the crimes committed and the harsh punishments meted out to hundreds of persons who were involved in the December 1950 riots were continually published by prominent newspapers on the island and aired via radio broadcasts as deterrents against further violent behaviour. In general, the charges laid against men of varied occupations, ages and ethnic backgrounds could be reduced to several types: 'Unlawful Assembly', 'Causing Grievous Hurt', 'Public Mischief', 'Robbery' and 'House Trespass'. Only a handful among those tried was acquitted on grounds of insufficient evidence.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *The Straits Times*, 22th February, 1951.

¹⁷⁹ *Utusan Melayu*, 22nd March, 1951.

¹⁸⁰ *The Straits Times*, 15th February-10th April, 1951.

In the intervening time, Gimson's forbearance towards the *Melayu Raya* had been diminished by the paper's inflammatory articles. Sensationalised stories on the Maria Hertogh case and riots were published repeatedly across its pages, and editorial columns called for heightened activism among Muslims in resistance to the colonialists and disbelievers. As a matter of fact, Muslim leaders in the colony were distraught by the newspaper's provocative posture. In one of its editorials, for example, *Melayu Raya* avered that the *ulama* in South Thailand referred to the Hertogh case as a test of the Muslims by Allah and an admonition that divine laws should be preserved and not taken lightly. The paper also reported that the *ulama* saw the Maria Hertogh controversy as an important moment in determining the future course of the Muslim community in Singapore and the Federation.¹⁸¹

The coverage given on the statements made by the much-revered *ulama* in South Thailand was regarded by the colonial government as an unambiguous sign that the *Melayu Raya* was fermenting hatred among Muslims in Singapore. On the night of 19th January 1951, J.E. Fairbairn, an Assistant Superintendent of the Special Branch, walked into the office of the Melayu Raya Press to issue an order withdrawing the license of not only the newspaper but of the entire publishing firm as well. Justifying such a contentious move, the Singapore Colonial Secretary invoked the Printing Press Ordinance, which provided him with the jurisdiction to withdraw the license of any publishing firm or newspaper that threatened public

¹⁸¹ *Melayu Raya*, 18th January, 1951.

peace. The Ordinance permitted the proscribed parties to lodge an appeal with the Governor-in-Council.¹⁸²

During an interview with news agencies in Singapore, Mohammed Saleh bin Alu (the Secretary of the Melayu Raya Press) mentioned that the publishing firm was appalled by the abrupt withdrawal of its license, which was due to expire in December 1951. The directors of the Press were undecided on the question of lodging an appeal. What was certain was that seventy-five of the firm's employees had now lost their source of livelihood.¹⁸³ Gimson anticipated a barrage of verbal attacks from sympathizers of the Melayu Raya Press. Astonishingly, major newspapers in Singapore and Malaya refrained from publishing any commentaries on the issue. Newspapers of smaller circulation regarded the closing down of the publishing firm as a discriminatory act. The colonial administration attributed such benign resistance to the effectiveness of the large-scale arrests, and to the influence of several Muslim elites in providing detailed explanations of the rationale behind governmental action.¹⁸⁴ Even members of the radical Singapore Muslim League planned to reinstate Melayu Raya Press' license only through legal means.¹⁸⁵

More interestingly, the closure of Melayu Raya Press brought about severe criticisms of the Singapore government from British officials in London. It is worthwhile here to quote a memorandum from the Colonial Office at length so as to illuminate the tensions between the Home Government and Singapore:

¹⁸² *Utusan Melayu*, 20th January, 1951.

¹⁸³ *The Singapore Free Press*, 20th January, 1951.

¹⁸⁴ 'Extract from PMR No. 1 dated 31/1/51', CO 537/7302.

¹⁸⁵ 'Singapore Political Report for January, 1951', CO 537/7342.

The practice adopted in the case of *Melayu Raya*, a Malay daily, of withdrawing the license of its printing press, *is a clumsy one*, since a press often publishes more than one paper and does a considerable amount of printing on the side. To close down the press in such cases unnecessarily penalizes persons and papers against whom there is no complaint. Consideration is therefore being given to enforcing a section of the Printing Presses Ordinance passed pre-war by which individual newspapers and periodicals have to obtain permits to publish. It will facilitate control over the press and, as has been mentioned above, is part of our peacetime laws. The Emergency Regulations published last year, do not allow action to be taken until the damage has been done; that, as has been too tragically proved by the events of last December, is often too late [*italics mine*].¹⁸⁶

The local government in Singapore responded to this criticism by stressing that the *Melayu Raya* newspaper had inflamed Muslim feelings both before and after the riots. Although the newspaper did not engage in acts of sedition that could have amounted to contempt of court, it was a major threat to public peace and the colonial order. Furthermore, the paper had, on numerous occasions, ignored warnings and appeals that were issued by governmental agencies. The editors had also been given the privilege to appeal against the withdrawal of the firm's license, but they had not done so.¹⁸⁷ To address the Home Government's concerns, Malcolm Macdonald gave specific instructions to British officials in Jakarta to emphasise that the *Melayu Raya* Press had transgressed the laws of the colony. British officials were also required to stress that 'the main reason for the

¹⁸⁶ 'Singapore Political Report for January, 1951', CO 537/7342.

¹⁸⁷ 'Federation of Malaya – Political Report No. 1 for January 1951', CO 537/7341.

attitude taken by the newspaper has been a drive to increase circulation by sensationalism, in which they were far from successful.’¹⁸⁸

On 16th February, 1951, the Singapore Colonial Secretary proposed a motion in the Legislative Council to prolong the period of Emergency. His main justification was a decline in the security of the colony as reflected by the arrests of subversive elements in schools, cases of arson and, most crucially, crimes committed during the riots. The motion was agreed upon without any dissension.¹⁸⁹ The continuation of the period of Emergency meant that large numbers of policemen and army officers could be mobilized in the face of any perceived threats. Such prerogative was exercised just two weeks later when large numbers of uniformed policemen together with a Gurkha squad, were dispatched to the Singapore Supreme Court as a precautionary measure in the midst of the lawsuit filed by the Melayu Raya Press against the Singapore Colonial Secretary. The gallery of the court was packed with directors, employees and sympathisers of the Melayu Raya Press. Counsel for the appellant, Nazir Mallal, argued in court that the withdrawal of the publishing firm’s license ran contrary to the laws of the colony. In an interview with newspaper reporters outside the court’s premises, Nazir Mallal remarked that: ‘It is monstrous that an executive officer should have the authority, by a stroke of the few [*sic*], not only to gag a newspaper but to kill it outright...We were under the impression that such things happened only in totalitarian states.’¹⁹⁰ The case gained much publicity in the days that followed. In the last analysis, the court ruled that the paper and its publishing firm were to

¹⁸⁸ ‘Commissioner-General in South East Asia, Singapore to Djakarta, 26th January, 1951’, CO537/7302.

¹⁸⁹ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 16th February, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1953), p. B41.

¹⁹⁰ *The Straits Times*, 27th February, 1951

cease all forms of publication for ten months. A requirement for its future re-opening was the sacking of one of its chief editors, Haji Mohd Dahlan bin Masod.¹⁹¹

The court's verdict did not lead to the demise of *Melayu Raya*'s rhetorical resistance against British colonial rule. In the same month, one of its directors, Amir bin Haji Omar, told an audience in Malacca that Muslim youths in Singapore were ready for violence far greater in intensity than the Maria Hertogh riots. He appealed for Malays in the Malay Peninsula to support their oppressed compatriots in Singapore. The outbreak of a third world war, Amir highlighted, was inevitable. This, along with the assistance of Muslim organisations, would enable Malays to obtain their independence.¹⁹² The British reacted by arresting another batch of suspected agitators. Fifteen Malays, seven Indian Muslims and one Chinese Muslim were detained under Emergency Regulations.¹⁹³ In mid-April 1951, the Singapore Colonial Secretary revealed that another group of 333 persons had been detained in connection with the December riots.

In his report to the Prime Minister, Emmanuel Shinwell (British Minister of Defence) highlighted that the situation in Singapore and Malaya was far from improving.¹⁹⁴ British troops and policemen were expected to intensify the proscriptions of instigators of violence. At the same time, some disquiet had arisen within British circles in regard to the wrongful arrests of suspected criminals.

¹⁹¹ 'Melayu Press Limited v. W.L. Blythe The Colonial Secretary, March 9, 1951', *The Malayan Law Journal*, 17, (1951), pp. 88-90.

¹⁹² 'Federation of Malaya – Political Report No. 3 for March 1951', CO 537/7341 and 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, March – April, 1951', CO 537/7343.

¹⁹³ 'Colonial Office – Malaya – Period 2nd – 8th March (1951)', CO 537/7271.

¹⁹⁴ 'Emmanuel Shinwell to Clement Atlee, 28th April, 1951', CO 537/7263.

Officials in Singapore and Malaya observed that a significant number of those detained under Emergency Regulations were victims of private quarrels, or grudges between informants and suspects. Adding to the complications, police detectives were reluctant to disclose the names of their informants upon the request of the Advisory Committee.¹⁹⁵ High-ranking officials in Whitehall were perturbed by the issue, viewing it as a source of diplomatic fissure between Britain and the colonized peoples in Malaya. Finally, it was decided that:

where a member of the public volunteered information but was unwilling to make a signed statement, the police should forward a report of their interview with him to the Committee and should include in it an account of the circumstances in which words or actions reported by him had occurred; and, if he was unwilling that his identity should be disclosed even to the Committee, the police should be prepared themselves to attend before the Committee and give evidence of their knowledge of the informant and their estimate of the value of his information. Where information had been supplied by a regular police agent whose identity ought not to be disclosed, even to the Committee, his name was not mentioned in reports but it was stated how long he had been known to the police, whether he had been found reliable in the past, and what were his relations with and knowledge of the appellant.¹⁹⁶

Towards end of May, the Singapore Government announced that twelve civil servants had been detained in connection with the riots. 406 persons who were arrested in the aftermath of the December riots had been released, seventy-eight

¹⁹⁵ 'Attorney-General's Chambers (Kuala Lumpur) to W.L. Dale (Colonial Office), 15th May, 1951', CO 537/7281.

¹⁹⁶ 'A.S. Oakley (Home Office) to B.O.B Gidden (Colonial Office), 31st May, 1951', CO 537/7281.

others were convicted and twenty-one acquitted. Most of those who had been acquitted were still under detention.¹⁹⁷

- **TO ERR IS HUMAN, TO FORGIVE DIVINE**

The first death sentence for participation in the riots was passed on 15th June, 1951. A.K.S. Othman Ghani, an Indian Muslim, was found guilty of the murder of an Royal Air Force (RAF) Corporal, Peter Hugh Bell.¹⁹⁸ He was accused of attacking and setting fire to the soldier at Victoria Street, which led to the latter's death. The defendant's lawyer, David Marshall, argued in court that his client had played no part in the murder.¹⁹⁹ Six other Muslim men were condemned to death on the following month. Thamby bin Osman, Habee Kassim bin Syed Abdul Kader, Tamby bin Sidek, Dawood bin Mohammed, Zainuddin bin Taha and Mat Din bin Said were found guilty of the murder of a Warrant Officer, John William Davies of the RAF, who originated from Hereford, West England. The defendants for this murder were represented by Sandy Pillay, who successfully applied for an adjournment of the Appeal hearing to 31 August, 1952.²⁰⁰ Tamby bin Osman maintained that he had no role in the murder of John Davies as he was not at the scene of the crime.²⁰¹

Meantime, in an effort to tighten its grip on the press, the Singapore Government promulgated a new Emergency Regulation, which, as of 1st August

¹⁹⁷ 'Colonial Office – Malaya – Period 18th – 24th May (1951)', CO 537/7271 and *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 22nd April, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. B46.

¹⁹⁸ 'Colonial Office – Malaya – Period 15th – 21st June (1951)', CO 537/7271.

¹⁹⁹ *The Straits Times*, 15th June, 1951.

²⁰⁰ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, 15th January – 15th February, 1952', CO 537/7343.

²⁰¹ "Recorded interview with Mr. Tamby Osman, 10th April, 1986", *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000641).

1951, required all newspapers and magazines published in the Colony to obtain a permit from the Singapore Colonial Secretary. The new Regulations provided the Singapore Colonial Secretary with wider powers to withdraw the permits of all sorts of publications without closing the printing presses where the material had been printed. Parties who had been proscribed were allowed to appeal to the Governor-in-Council, whose decision was final.²⁰² Arguing in defense of the new regulation, *British Malaya* magazine stated that,

No one likes the powers or the situation which has made them necessary, but they are necessary reserve powers against any subversive press which may spring up. Government have confidence in the mature Press at present established in Singapore, a great international press activity, and hope that the powers will not have to be used and, that if they are used, the Press will be convinced of the justice of the Government action.²⁰³

Political activists in the United Kingdom were not persuaded. Rather, the regulation was denounced as a strategy concocted to silent dissenting voices within the colony. Criticisms and protests were hurled against the colonial government by influential newspapers in London, which soon, inflamed the sensibilities of the Singapore populace.²⁰⁴ At a Legislative Council meeting, C.J. Dasaratha Raj suggested that 'the new regulations have been motivated purely and simply by the greed of the Executive to arrogate to themselves sweeping powers over the Press, not out of necessity for public safety, but as a protection against

²⁰² . *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 17th July, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. B148.

²⁰³ *British Malaya*, September, 1951, p. 318.

²⁰⁴ 'Political Summary - July 1951 - Part III - Colonial Territories - Singapore', A1838/2.

public criticism.'²⁰⁵ As a result of the tough resistance from newspapers and community leaders, the Regulation was amended. Printing presses that had been proscribed were given the right to appeal to an Advisory Committee, instead of to the Governor-in-Council. The press in Singapore and London congratulated the government for its handling of the matter and for its positive response to criticisms of the original Regulations.²⁰⁶

The Singapore police continued to conduct routine checks and raids on residences of persons with radical intents, namely Communists and opportunists from within the Muslim community. In one successful raid of a Malayan Communist Party Communication Centre, evidence was found linking several communists to planned assaults upon British servicemen during the December 1950 riots.²⁰⁷ Another source of unanticipated trouble emerged out of a ploy by four Malay prostitutes, who were reportedly Muslims. These prostitutes were known to have serviced several men who were working at the Salvation Army Home. On one fateful evening, the prostitutes were heard shouting over a wall at the Home, appealing to a Malay passerby for help. They claimed to have been coerced into attending Christian religious services. The Special Branch reacted swiftly. The prostitutes were detained and placed in the custody of the Social Welfare Department. They were later transferred to a non-religious reform institution to avoid further controversies. The British hastened to seek the assistance of members of the Muslim Advisory Board, who clarified to the Muslim public that the rumours of the forceful conversion of the four prostitutes

²⁰⁵ 'Colonial Office – Malaya – Period 27th July – 2nd August (1951)', CO 537/7271 and *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 18th September, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B256.

²⁰⁶ 'Singapore Political Report for October 1951', CO 1022/206.

²⁰⁷ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 9, September 1951', CO 537/6801.

were untrue.²⁰⁸ Reporting these incidents to James Griffiths, Gimson asserted that the 'possibility of trouble cannot be ignored. In consequence, police and military are ready to act at once if required.'²⁰⁹

Melayu Raya Press regained its license in September, 1951 and resumed publication on 11th November of that year. Even so, its popularity as seen during the height of the Maria Hertogh legal tussle had waned.²¹⁰ The paper was also faced with serious financial problems, due to the withdrawal of funds by its major share holders.²¹¹ Fissures had developed among the editors, who disagreed on the operations of the newspaper. Although intensive efforts were made to regain the newspaper's daily circulation by publishing articles pertaining to Malay education, Islamic thought and various social problems that were plaguing the Muslim communities in Malaya, the readership had progressively shifted to *Utusan Melayu*. In August 1953, *Melayu Raya* finally collapsed.²¹²

Towards the end of 1951, Muslims in Singapore combined their energies to agitate for the release of Karim Ghani and five others who had been detained with him. The services of Ahmad Ibrahim, a renowned social activist and expert lawyer, were engaged, and in consequence, two detainees, Darus Shariff and Syed Ali Al-Attas were released. Although suffering from tuberculosis, Karim Ghani maintained that he had been unjustly detained and thereby refused to present his case to the Advisory Committee. Fully informed of the seriousness of his

²⁰⁸ 'Singapore Political Report for August, 1951', CO 537/7342.

²⁰⁹ 'Franklin Gimson to J.D Murray, 31st August, 1951', FO 371/93117. See also CO 953/10/6.

²¹⁰ *Melayu Raya*, 12th November, 1951.

²¹¹ 'Singapore Political Report for December 1951', CO 1022/206, p. 6.

²¹² Mek Siti bte Hussin, "Melayu Raya" in Khoo Kay Kim (ed.), *Lembaran Akhbar Melayu* (Kuala Lumpur: Persatuan Sejarah Malaysia, 1980), pp. 167-185 and Nik Ahmad, "The Malay Press", *J.M.B.R.A.S.*, 36, 1, (1963), pp. 70-78.

condition, the Singapore Muslim League appealed to the Singapore Colonial Secretary to expedite Karim Ghani's release.²¹³ The British were unsure of the political ramifications arising from the League's appeal. Karim Ghani's detention was extended.

Together with this, Muslim activists in Singapore and Malaya gathered signatures for a petition on behalf of the men who were condemned to death. The leader of this venture was Tengku Abdul Rahman, who after the fall from favour and resignation of Dato Onn on 26th August 1951, had been elected as the second President of UMNO. Having given their full support to Dato Onn bin Jaafar, who was dubbed by Sir Henry Gurney (the British High Commissioner in Malaya) as the 'hope of the Malayan peoples', the British were perplexed by the Tengku's political stances and manoeuvres.²¹⁴ They viewed the forty-eight-year-old Tengku as an elusive figure whom, despite his friendly disposition and close relationship with several prominent British officials, was pressing for a rapid transfer of power to a Malay-led government in Malaya. This was in sharp contrast with the straight-talking Dato Onn who advocated a slower movement towards independence.²¹⁵ To Henry Gurney, the Tengku was far from being the 'sort of leader who will be capable of holding UMNO together in any important controversy.'²¹⁶ Gurney's prediction turned out to be far from accurate. Determined to protect the rights and interests of the Malays and to garner support for his leadership and party, the Tengku avoided stirring up Muslim feelings amidst such heated moments. Instead, he stressed repeatedly that the party should

²¹³ 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 6th December, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

²¹⁴ 'Henry Gurney to John D. Higham, 13th June, 1951', CO 537/7303.

²¹⁵ 'J.M. Gullick to Robert Heussler, 10th October, 1981', Robert Heussler Papers.

²¹⁶ 'Sir Henry Gurney to John D. Higham, 29th August, 1951', CO 537/7297.

adopt non-violent means in campaigning for the release of the convicted persons and that UMNO members should be 'friendly with foreigners and not be led away by specious arguments.'²¹⁷ During his visit to Singapore in December 1951, which was hosted by the Singapore Branch of UMNO, the Tengku again gave 'sensible advice that they should approach their problems in a constructive spirit and aim at improving education as the first step in a constitutional struggle for a proper place in the community.'²¹⁸ By the end of February 1952, the Tengku had obtained more than five thousand signatures on a petition against the death sentences and for the verdict to be reduced to imprisonment. He had played a decisive role in raising funds to aid the condemned men's dependents, and was also present at every court proceeding to show his overt support for those convicted.²¹⁹

Consequently, Othman Ghani's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Tengku Abdul Rahman was proclaimed the Hero of the Malays.²²⁰ Following on to this was the waiving of the death sentences passed upon Zainuddin bin Taha and Mat Din bin Said for their part in the murder of John Davies. The death sentence was commuted to seven years of rigorous imprisonment for charges of rioting. The appeals of four other men were rejected, as there was strong evidence of their direct involvement in the murder.²²¹ Although Malays in Singapore were pleased by such developments, feelings of unhappiness were also slowly developing, not due to the Maria Hertogh case, but

²¹⁷ 'Extract from PMR, 12/1951', CO 1022/183.

²¹⁸ 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report - 15th March-15th April, 1952', CO 537/7343.

²¹⁹ 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report - 15th March-15th April, 1952', CO 537/7343.

²²⁰ *Utusan Melayu*, 15th February, 1952 and *Singapore Standard*, 15th February, 1952.

²²¹ "Tamby bin Osman & ORS. v. Rex, March 28, 1952", *Malayan Law Journal*, 18, (1952), pp. 220-222 and *Utusan Melayu*, 29th March, 1952 and *Majlis*, 29th March, 1952.

because of their weak economic position and difficult access to employment.²²² Local Indian Muslims reacted otherwise. Rumours were circulated that the British were in cahoots with the Dutch, and that there was no longer any justice in Singapore. The police reacted by issuing warnings to identified rumour-mongers.²²³

Karim Ghani was released a month later under Suspension Orders, as the British considered him to be inconsequential to the colony's security. Still, his movements were severely restricted.²²⁴ In spite of strong appeals and encouragement from his supporters to pioneer another newspaper, Karim Ghani refused to partake in any forms of activism within Malaya. He expressed his decision to live in a sovereign state and continue the struggle for the cause of Muslims who were subjected to colonial rule. Accordingly, he was an example of many activists in Southeast Asia who had sought to challenge the colonial order through constitutional, discursive as well as violent means, and in the process, failed to achieve their intended objectives. The last yet significant act of resistance Karim Ghani had employed was 'strategic desertion' - a planned and conscious departure from the arena of contestation to a new site beyond the colonial orbit of influence and control. Such a strategy was pursued with the intent of sustaining a form of resistance from without.²²⁵ Karim Ghani was not the first to have adopted the course of strategic desertion as a form of resistance. Merely two years before his arrest, some thirty Malays from Singapore and Malaya had fled to Indonesia to

²²² 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report - 15th February-15th March, 1952', CO 537/7343.

²²³ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 4, April 1952', CO 968/265. See also, 'Extract from PMR, 3/1952', CO 1022/434.

²²⁴ *The Straits Times*, 22nd April, 1952.

²²⁵ See Chapter One, p. 8.

regroup and pursue their struggle against British colonialists in the wake of the Emergency.²²⁶ Led by Ibrahim Haji Yaakob, the group of radicals had established an organisation named the *Panitia Kemerdekaan Malaya* (PKM, or the Committee for Malayan Independence) whose main objective was to agitate and, if necessary, to militate for the creation of an independent Malaya. In the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots, the organisation sent letters to the British Parliament in London urging for the immediate release of Karim Ghani and many others who had been detained. To them, the series of arrests of Muslims in Singapore represented an infringement of democratic principles and the rights of the Malays who were the natives of the island. An appeal was also sent to the United Nations and all major Muslim organisations in India, Burma, the Philippines and Indonesia, appealing to them to pressure the British against the suppression of Muslims in Singapore and mainland Malaya.²²⁷

Although born in India, Karim Ghani's application for his return to his native country was categorically rejected by the state authorities. Politicians and activists in Pakistan, on the other hand, welcomed him with open arms, and began to prepare for his accommodation and other necessities several months prior to his release.²²⁸ On 2nd May, 1952, Karim Ghani was escorted by two Pakistani representatives to the Singapore airport. A crowd of about seventy supporters, consisting mainly of Indians and a small group of Malays, assembled at the airport to see their leader for the last time. Speeches were delivered in praise of Karim Ghani's sacrifices and contributions to the Muslim community in Singapore.

²²⁶ Gordon Means, *Malaysian Politics* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1976), p. 119.

²²⁷ *Antara*, 27th December, 1950 and Ramlah Adam, *Gerakan Radikalisme di Malaysia, 1938-1965*, p. 363.

²²⁸ 'Telegram from Inamullah Khan to Bashir Mallal, 14th December, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

There were a few who exploited the occasion to rouse the feelings of the crowd by shouting Islamic war cries. Indian Muslims were reported to have made several comments which created a limited commotion within the community. The British were very much relieved that the voice of Karim Ghani had been muted for many years to come.²²⁹

Karim Ghani's permanent departure from Singapore was followed by the release of Mohamed Taha Kalu, Mohamed Mustaza and Dr. Burhanuddin, upon the recommendation of the Advisory Committee. The British foresaw the discharge of these men as having 'a far wider effect' upon the growing positive attitudes among Muslims towards the Government.²³⁰ Neither demonstrations nor ferment directed against the British were seen when the three Malay personalities were greeted by a crowd of supporters. Yet, prayers were offered to the four Malays whose appeals for their death sentences to be reprieved had been rejected.²³¹ Tengku Abdul Rahman had collected more than 140,000 signatures from UMNO members and 2000 Muslims in Singapore on a petition appealing for clemency on the behalf the condemned men.²³²

Meanwhile, four Malay men who were charged with the murder of Charles Joseph Ryan, a non-commissioned RAF officer, were acquitted of their crimes due to contradictions in the witnesses' testimony and the poor visibility at scene in

²²⁹ 'Singapore Political Report for April, 1952', CO 1022/206; 'Extract from P.M.R, 5/1952', CO 1022/434; 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report - 15th May-15th June, 1952', CO 1022/208 and 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report: 15th April - 15th May, 1952', FO 371/101224.

²³⁰ 'Federation of Malaya: Political Report No. 4 for April, 1952', FO 371/101224.

²³¹ 'Intelligence Report for Fortnightly ending 16th June, 1952', CO 1022/206.

²³² *Melayu Raya*, 19th June, 1952 and *Singapore Standard*, 19th June, 1952.

which the murder had taken place. Describing the crucial part he and F.B. Oehlers played as attorneys in defending the men, Lee Kuan Yew recalled that:

There was disgust on the faces of the English judge and English prosecutor. I, too, was sickened by the result....I had casted doubt on the prosecution's case and thwarted justice. I had no doubt that my four clients did kill Ryan, that they were keyed-up that night and would have murdered any white or partly white person who came their way, anyone associated with the Christian religion and thus, to them, against Islam. I had no faith in a system that allowed the superstition, ignorance, biases, prejudices and fears of seven jurymen to determine guilt or innocence.²³³

The long-term effects of Lee Kuan Yew's discontentment with the legal verdict will be elaborated upon in the concluding chapter of this thesis. Suffice it to state here that on 22nd July 1952, the newly installed Singapore Governor, John F. Nicoll, reprieved Tamby bin Osman, Habee Kassim bin S.A. Kader, Thamby bin Sidek and Dawood bin Mohammed who had all been sentenced to death for the murder of John W. Davies. Instead, they would serve terms of life imprisonment, and would be eligible for early release for good conduct.²³⁴ The governor's decision was undoubtedly part of a progressive endeavour to overcome the colonial government's legitimization crisis in the aftermath of the riots. Muslims were overjoyed, and registered their appreciation towards Nicoll's gesture of clemency. The *Utusan Melayu* and *Majlis* editorials went as far as commending the Governor's move as 'wise' and thanked the Tengku for his efforts in being a true leader of the Malays.²³⁵ ²³⁶ Towards the end of the year, UMNO members in

²³³ Lee Kuan Yew, *The Singapore Story: Memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew* (Singapore: Times Editions, 1998), p. 144.

²³⁴ 'Reuter Report, 22nd July, 1952', CO 1022/434 and *Straits Times*, 23rd July, 1952.

²³⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 24th July, 1952.

Selangor sent yet another letter of appeal to Queen Elizabeth II, appealing for the shortening of the prison sentences of hundreds of others who had been detained during the riots.²³⁷ The British responded negatively to the letter and upheld the verdicts of the Singapore courts. More importantly, the beginning of the year 1953 marked the end of the British strategy of proscriptions related to the Maria Hertogh case.

• CONCLUSION - *ANNUS HORRIBILIS*

In conclusion, it was reported that there was more crime and violence in Singapore in 1951 than in any year since the restoration of peace and order in Singapore in 1947. This, according to the *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force*, 'was almost entirely due to the reaction following upon the riots in December 1950 when lawlessness was still high amongst the criminal elements in Singapore.'²³⁸ In other words, 1951 was an *annus horribilis* (a horrible year) for the colonial government. Partly due to the tactics of imposing curfews, raids, arrests, and routine checks, as well as the issuing of public warnings, the introduction and enforcement of legal regulations and the sentencing of convicted criminals, there was a drastic drop in street violence and other criminal activities related to the Maria Hertogh controversy in the months that followed. Oddly enough, in the process of restoring the security of the colony, the British had engaged in the use of coercion and, in many instances, the abuse of their authority. They had responded to mass violence by reasserting the 'claim to the monopoly of

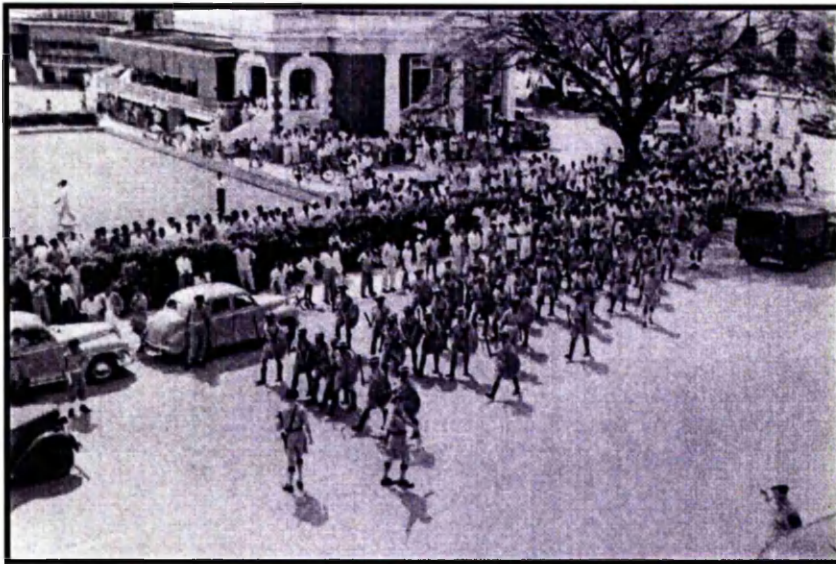
²³⁶ *Utusan Melayu*, 24th July, 1952.

²³⁷ 'Rayuan Kepada Baginda Queen - Orang Tahanan Kerana Nadrah, 30th December, 1952', UMNO/SEL, No. 27/53.

²³⁸ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1951*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 23.

legitimate physical violence within a certain territory.'²³⁹ Still, for the British intelligence agencies, statistics were not clear indications that the rage among Muslims in Singapore had entirely dissipated. In the next chapter, I will explore on the covert role of the Special Branch and other related bodies in teasing out fanatical undercurrents that were already rooted and fortified by the outbreak of violence.

²³⁹ Max Weber, *Weber: Political Writings* (trans. by Ronald Speirs) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 310-311.



Muslim demonstrators outside the Supreme Court guarded by scores of policemen
Source: National Archives of Singapore

CHAPTER 4

Surveillance

The outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots revealed, most crucially, the entrenched weaknesses of the British intelligence services. The basic assumption that all threats emanated from foreign agencies whose sole object was the displacement of British colonial rule and that 'subversive activities were always due to outside influence' was shattered and deemed obsolete, or, at least, shallow.²⁴⁰ Rather, the British became certain that the Islamic threat was from within as much as it was from without. Militant and radical ideologies and movements, the British now believed, were rooted within the Singapore Muslim community itself and there was to be no delay in redressing their past oversight. A broader and more effective system of espionage was established. Agents and spies infiltrated Muslim gatherings of all kinds, and monitored the evolving sentiments of all communities on the island. In some cases, however, the concerns and anxieties registered in British intelligence reports were driven largely by a paranoid sense of magnified dangers, rather than what was real.

This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the mechanics of 'surveillance' as part of the British strategy to anticipate selected forms of opposition to colonial rule in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault, posits that 'surveillance' is a vital function of modern states, as being 'the auxiliary of justice in the pursuit of criminals and as

²⁴⁰ René Onraet, *Singapore: A Police Background* (London: Dorothy Crisp, 1946), p. 109.

an instrument for the political supervision of plots, opposition movements or revolts.²⁴¹ In connection with this, I will demonstrate that, through the gathering of information and the monitoring of situations, the British had exposed crucial threats facing the colonial order. Yet, before moving on, it is instructive to point out that, although the concept of 'surveillance' is inextricably linked to the 'proscription' of the local population, as examined in the previous chapter, there is one fundamental difference which necessitates a separate discussion of the two spheres.

Unlike proscription, the identification of threats through surveillance did not necessarily lead to the arrests of individuals and the outlawing of institutions. In his study on the role of intelligence gathering prior to the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots, Anthony Stockwell noted that 'intelligence reports did not, after all, amount to policy.'²⁴² Even so, it is essential to expound upon the role of the intelligence services and other related agencies as this provides us with insights into how the 'men on the spot' made sense of and dealt with the varied forms of resistance that confronted them. Indeed, in examining dozens of intelligence reports pertaining to Muslim issues and other related affairs in such a tense setting, a historian will be enthralled by the intimate details with which day-to-day events and conversations were recorded. It reveals, most certainly, that a considerable number of the spies and informers consisted of Muslims from all classes and backgrounds.²⁴³ More than that, as Khoo Kay Kim has observed, these

²⁴¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (trans.) (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 214-215.

²⁴² Stockwell, "Imperial Security and Moslem Militancy", p. 327.

²⁴³ Although the names of informers were explicitly mentioned on several occasions, the identities of Special Branch agents were concealed in all of the reports. Crucial information with regards to the recruitment, organisation and inner workings of the intelligence services in Singapore and

reports enable the recovery of voices and discourses of local actors that are often muted within the pages of published sources, such as memoirs and newspapers.²⁴⁴ Intelligence reports are, undoubtedly, partial representations of the realities of the day. To address such limitation, I have juxtaposed the reports against a variety of other sources in order to reconstruct the context within which the surveillance of the local populace had been conducted.

Beyond that, insights into various developments in Malaya, Indonesia, Pakistan, and the Netherlands will be provided in so far as they affected the security of Singapore. From the perspective of the intelligence services, the epicentre of Muslim discontent resided in the colony, which called for a more widespread and intense surveillance. Though important and not to be neglected, developments in other territories were however looked upon as seemingly less dangerous due to their geographical distance. Indeed, one of the decisive measures that had been undertaken by the British was to harness the support of native collaborators in these territories who sought to exercise restraint upon the masses. The British Foreign Office in London had also instructed ambassadors in major Muslim countries, namely in cities such as Jakarta, Karachi, Cairo, Baghdad, Tehran, Jeddah, Damascus and Amman to provide updates on 'any agitation about this case [Maria Hertogh] which comes to your or their notice, and of any special angle which is being exploited and is likely to be exploited further...'²⁴⁵ The international context had a strong bearing upon the course of events in Singapore,

Malaya found in files CO968/727 (1945-1951) and CO 1030/16, as Leon Comber rightly observed, are still unavailable to the public. See Leon Comber, "The Malayan Security Service", *Intelligence and National Security*, 18, 3, (2003), p. 153, 95ff.

²⁴⁴ Khoo Kay Kim, *Malay Papers and Periodicals as Historical Sources* (Kuala Lumpur: Perpustakaan Universiti Malaya, 1984), pp. 20-31 and Khoo Kay Kim, "Malayan Historiography: A Further Look", *Kajian Malaysia*, 10, 1, (1992), p. 59.

²⁴⁵ 'Singapore to U.K. High Commissioner in Karachi, 18th January 1951', CO 537/7302.

and it was of paramount importance, therefore, that potential threats in these countries were detected at the very early stages. Crucial information that was sent to London would immediately be relayed to Singapore.

- **MOMENTS OF ANXIETY**

British intelligence services in Singapore and Malaya were on high alert for several fundamental developments that had been identified as serious threats to the security of the colony in the last days of December 1950. It was observed that misunderstandings and ignorance pervaded the minds of the general public. A majority were still poorly informed of essential facts pertaining to the legal dispute over the custody of Maria Hertogh, the reasons for the dissolution of the girl's marriage with Mansoor Adabi, and the circumstances that led to the confinement of Maria Hertogh in a Catholic Convent. The prevailing notion held by the Muslim masses was that the government was responsible for such unwise decisions. Another issue of contention was the arrest of Karim Ghani and the other members of his Nadra Action Committee.²⁴⁶

Then, there was also the plausible fear of communist exploitation of the case through subversive methods. Muslim members of the security forces in Malaya were reported to be troubled by their commitment to defend the polity against the communists after having witnessed the unfair treatment of their co-religionists. The communists, predictably, capitalised on this state of affairs by attempting to widen the split between the Christians and the Muslims. The

²⁴⁶ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797.

communist reaction was 'one of glee that they have at last found seeds for dissension between the British and the Muslims.'²⁴⁷

On 13th December 1950, a group of communists distributed two propaganda pamphlets in Romanised Malay, English and Chinese, highlighting jaundiced British policies towards the local population. Entitled 'Seruan Rakyat', the communists agitated for the transformation of the Nadra case from a mere religious struggle to a political one, led by a party capable of fighting for the people. Two weeks later, an English edition of the 'Freedom News' was circulated, with an article entitled 'Develop the fight against the Nadra decision into a wide struggle against the British Imperialists!' There were also posters seen in public places in Singapore which called for all races in Singapore to coalesce against the colonialists. The British initially suspected that Chinese students with leftist leanings were responsible for these productions. There were questions about whether or not the Central Command of the Malayan Communist Party (MCP) could have been the mastermind.²⁴⁸ As the Special Branch stepped up its raids upon various communist cells, it was found that the MCP was indeed the publisher and distributor of posters intended to entice Muslims and members of other communities to join an armed struggle with the 'Anti-British Liberation Army.'²⁴⁹ Such propaganda spilled over to the Peninsula in a drive to incite Muslim rage.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

²⁴⁸ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

²⁴⁹ 'Minutes of the 20th Meeting, held in the Colonial Secretary Office, Singapore, on Friday, 29th December, 1950', CO 537/6579.

²⁵⁰ 'Federation of Malaya – Political Report No. 1 for January 1951', CO 537/7341.

The next threat to security was a looming possibility that relations with Indonesians within and outside the colony would further deteriorate. From the perspective of the British intelligence agencies, such volatile relations would accentuate anti-Dutch and anti-British propaganda, which would then influence the perceptions of Muslims in Singapore towards the colonial administration. This sense of anxiety was not unfounded. On 14th December 1950, a day after the quelling of the riots, several prominent Muslims in Indonesia established a provisional committee in defence of the marriage between Mansoor Adabi and Maria Hertogh. The committee authorised two renowned lawyers, Dr. Datuk Djamin and D. Sujudi, to study the British court's verdict in preparation for the pursuit of a legal case. Telegrams were also sent to Dato Onn reminding him of his duty to defend Mansoor Adabi. Members of the committee planned to launch protests against what was seen as an insult to Islam.²⁵¹ Writing in a widely distributed daily newspaper, Haji Abdul Malik Karim Amrullah (or Hamka), a well-respected Muslim scholar and the leader of *Muhammadiyah* (one of Indonesia's largest Muslim movements), remarked that the placing of Maria Hertogh in a Catholic Convent was a clear sign of Western religious fanaticism. Muslims, according to Hamka, had remained submissive towards the oppressive measures undertaken by the British in the midst of the Malayan Emergency. In spite of that, as seen in the riots and other forms of resistance that would soon follow, their will to protect their religious beliefs should not be underestimated.²⁵² Hamka's polemics was complemented by resolutions passed by a newly established women's organisation, the *Front Wanita Indonesia* (Indonesia Women's Front). The organisation condemned the British for insulting Islam and

²⁵¹ *Antara*, 14th December, 1950.

²⁵² *Pedoman*, 20th December, 1950.

expressed sympathy towards Maria Hertogh, Mansoor Adabi and Muslims in Singapore who were struggling for their religious rights. Representatives of *Front Wanita Indonesia* urged Indonesian Muslims to give their fullest support towards regaining Maria Hertogh to Islam and to the fold of her husband.²⁵³

Hitherto, foremost in the British intelligence agencies' list of concerns was the heightened activism of Muslims in Singapore in the aftermath of the riots. Distrust between Muslims and the British government had become so deeply entrenched that 'there is no prospect of any solution acceptable to the Muslim community. Even the moderate religious leaders, and the leaders of the Muslim communities have only told their adherents to "wait and see" the result of the appeals. No Muslim leader has yet indicated publicly that if the final decision goes against them it should be peacefully accepted.'²⁵⁴ As a result, Malay detectives were deployed to keep a watchful eye on all forms of antagonism. The Special Branch was especially concerned with the Southeast Asia Muslim Missionary Conference organized by *Jamiyah*.

From the 24th to the 25th of December 1950, the Victoria Theatre in Singapore was packed with delegates from the Philippines, Perak, Kedah, Kinta, Malacca, Negri Sembilan, Perlis and Selangor as well as UMNO representatives from various parts of Malaya. Dozens of prominent Muslim and Christian leaders from Singapore were also present as observers. Indonesian Muslims were reported to have expressed their readiness to send their representatives, but such plans were later shelved. The Conference had actually been scheduled for an earlier date, but

²⁵³ *Antara*, 23rd December, 1950.

²⁵⁴ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

was postponed due to the lack of funding and the poor response from Muslim organisations in the region.²⁵⁵ The violence that had taken place in the colony delayed the event further. Even so, key personalities, such as Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddique and Syed Ibrahim Alsagoff, who were deeply engaged in calming Muslims during the riots, ensured that the event which they had been planning for many months was finally held.

The aims of the Conference were essentially three-fold. The first was to provide a comprehensive assessment of Muslim missionary activities in Southeast Asia, particularly in territories where Muslim minorities were faced with state intrusions upon their religious rights. In relation to this, the organizers hoped to establish a coordinated network of missionary activities under the umbrella of *Jamiyah*. Secondly, the Conference sought to address the threats posed by Christian missionary activities in Southeast Asia. This was a problem that had been repeatedly raised by a Singapore-based journal, *The Muslim World*. In one of its earlier issues, the journal had criticized the underhanded methods of Christian missionaries in offering material gifts to proselytise Malays.²⁵⁶ It was thus not incidental that the 25th of December (Christmas Day), was chosen as one of the days of the Conference. Last of all, the Conference organisers hoped to obtain the support of the participants towards the establishment of a Muslim Theological University in Southeast Asia.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 4th June, 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

²⁵⁶ *The Muslim World*, 1, 1, (1949), p. 22.

²⁵⁷ See Ahmad bin Mohamed Ibrahim and Wanjor bin Abu Bakar, *Report of the Southeast Asia Muslim Missionary Conference: Held at the Victoria Memorial Hall on 24th and 25th December, 1950* (Singapore: All-Malaya Muslim Missionary Society, 1950) and 'Review of Islamic Affairs-4th Quarter 1950', FO 371/91250.

Informed of the Conference's aims and objectives since its planning stages, British intelligence was predictably nervous about stray comments and public statements related to the Maria Hertogh incident. Their worst fears were, of course, met. In his keynote address, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddique expressed regret about the absence of important delegates from various parts of Southeast Asia. A significant case in point was the last minute cancellation of the arrival of representatives of *Masyumi* (Indonesia's largest Muslim political party) in view of the recent disturbances in Singapore.²⁵⁸ The Maulana emphasized that, since Islamic laws were divine and comprehensive, they did not need any fundamental reforms. It was obligatory for Muslims to sacrifice their lives, property and children to uphold Divine laws. The Maulana went on to elaborate on how Muslims in various parts of the world were oppressed by secular regimes, subtly referring to the state of affairs in Singapore. Muslims, he argued, had for many years been denied of proper education, yet still remained a powerful force to be reckoned with. Realising this, the enemies of Islam had devised manifold schemes to destroy Islam from without, but their efforts had failed. They then attempted to destroy Muslim unity from within. A stark example, said the Maulana, was the case of the Turkish people who had placed nationalism above their faith, leading to a progressive dismantling of their traditions. The Maulana further reiterated the rhetoric of Muslim revivalists who called for the restoration of the internationalist nature of Islam and universal Muslim brotherhood. Muslims were expected to show respect to all other religious beliefs and, in the process, demand due respect from them. Alluding to the British, he forcefully asserted that democratic governments should not, in any way, compel Muslims to act in ways contrary to

²⁵⁸ See *Antara* 2nd and 9th December, 1950.

their beliefs. He urged Muslim missionaries who were present at the Conference to view the world as their stage and to place upon their shoulders the responsibility of working towards the betterment of mankind. Muslim missionaries should be well-prepared to be dispatched to all corners of the globe in order to admonish Muslims of their neglected religion, and to convert non-Muslims. The Maulana further informed the audience that committees had been formed to discuss ways to improve Muslim education, missionary work, and funding for missionary efforts, as well as to enact measures towards the preservation of Islamic laws in Southeast Asia. He appealed for the support of all delegates for the formation of a unified Muslim body in the region.²⁵⁹ The conference ended with the passing of nine resolutions. The Maulana closed the session by appealing to Muslims to contribute to the Nadra fund to secure the best legal aid possible. A prayer was read with the hope that Maria Hertogh would hold fast to Islamic beliefs.²⁶⁰

Muslims in Singapore were unimpressed with the objectives and intended resolutions of the conference. Echoing the views of a selected segment of the community, the *Melayu Raya* editorial contended that the aims of Conference were grandiose and impractical. Moreover, most of the delegates were not respected Islamic scholars from the region. The editorial caricatured Maulana Abdul Aleem's speech as lofty rhetoric that fell short of addressing the real problems faced by Muslims in Southeast Asia.²⁶¹ *Utusan Melayu* concurred with *Melayu Raya*'s viewpoints, but gave more emphasis to the presence of spies at the

²⁵⁹ Ahmad and Wanjor, *Report of the Southeast Asia Muslim Missionary Conference*, pp. 14-24. See also, *The Singapore Free Press*, 26th December, 1950 and *Straits Echo*, 27th December, 1950.

²⁶⁰ *Utusan Melayu*, 26th December, 1950.

²⁶¹ *Melayu Raya*, 28th December, 1950.

Conference. The number of Special Branch officers, according to *Utusan Melayu*, was 'extraordinary' and as such was a direct encroachment upon the civil liberties of Muslims.²⁶² Seen from the perspective of the British intelligence agencies, the event 'has certainly served to give greater solidarity to Muslim opinion.'²⁶³

The day after the conference, a Eurasian who had shot and wounded two Malays during the riots was released from detention. Henry L. Velge was an officer in the Singapore Volunteer Corps (S.V.C.) and a member of the Special Constabulary. His release from all legal charges heightened public antipathy towards the British judicial system. The British anticipated vengeful attempts upon Velge. To the contrary, Velge was left unharmed as the news of his release was kept from the general public and a small circle of Muslims within Singapore.²⁶⁴ Much of the public attention was directed towards campaigning for the release of six Muslim activists who were arrested via Detention Orders on 18th December 1950.

Meanwhile, British agents kept a close watch on the formation of several Muslim-based committees. On 20th December 1950, the day after the detention of Karim Ghani, an action committee was founded by *Jamiyah* to provide legal aid to the detainees and to supply them with books, periodicals and other necessities.²⁶⁵ The committee's first course of action was to issue a press statement highlighting governmental violation of basic human rights, asserting that if the arrest of Karim

²⁶² *Utusan Melayu*, 26th December, 1950.

²⁶³ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797. See also 'Political Summary-1st December 1950 to 31st January 1951 Part III – Colonial Territories – Singapore', CO 537/7346.

²⁶⁴ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302.

²⁶⁵ 'Secretary of Singapore Muslim League to Secretary of *Jamiyah*, 22nd December, 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

Ghani and five other men 'was a precautionary measure, as tranquillity and order is restored in the city, their early release should now take effect. In any case, if their detention is to be prolonged, they should be given chances to represent their case to the Advisory Committee set up under the Emergency Regulation.'²⁶⁶ The committee was classified as a minor threat by the British intelligence. It was perceived as a mere 'face-saving manoeuvre' to appease the Muslim public and a platform to offer legal advice in accordance to the laws of the colony.²⁶⁷ Another committee that was scrutinized was the Nadra Appeal Committee. Formed by the Singapore Muslim League, its chief objective was to centralise and distribute monetary aid from Muslims locally and globally. More than \$20,000 was raised by the end of 1950. A large amount of the money came from Muslims within the rank and file of the Malay Regiment, the Special Constabulary and various departments of the Civil Service in Malaya.²⁶⁸

Members of the Singapore Muslim League went beyond the mere collection of funds. To step up their opposition to British arrests of respected Muslim leaders, Karim Ghani was elected as the organisation's Patron at an Annual General Meeting which was held on the 28th January 1951. The election of Karim Ghani was proposed by Hussain Mohammed Khan of the Muslim Publishing House and seconded by Mohammed Sulaiman, who was working as a broker. Attended by sixty-five persons, a majority of whom were of South Indian Muslim origin, the meeting was delayed for some few hours due to the absence of a substantial number of members who neither supported nor opposed the election

²⁶⁶ 'Press Statement by *Jamiyah* and Singapore Muslim League, 25th December, 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers. See also, *The Straits Times*, 27th December, 1950.

²⁶⁷ 'Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, December-January 1951', CO 537/7343.

²⁶⁸ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302. See also *The Straits Times*, 10th January, 1951 and *Melayu Raya*, 10th January, 1951.

of Karim Ghani. A possible explanation for their non-attendance was the fear of being placed under detention by the British. 'Extremist elements', as a British intelligence report put it, 'dominated the meeting. They rebuked the previous committee for its cowardly approaches in agitating the release of Karim Ghani and five others who had been detained.' Although he disagreed with the criticisms launched by the 'extremists', M.J. Namazie did not explicitly express his opinions during meeting, for that would have led to his defeat in the struggle for the presidency of the organisation.²⁶⁹

Namazie's strategy turned out to be successful, and he was eventually elected as the new President.²⁷⁰ In an interview with Special Branch officers, Namazie explained that the election of Karim Ghani as the patron was not representative of the views of the majority. Three key personalities, Sardon Jubir, J.M Jumabhoy and Adam Haji Ibrahim were elected as Executive Committee members, yet were absent during the meeting. Furthermore, the position that had been created was a symbolic gesture in view of Karim Ghani's role as a founder member of the League. Although the British were relieved that Muslims whom they regarded as 'moderate' had prevailed during the elections, the incorporation of new members such as Mansoor Adabi and the resolutions that were passed to assist the Melayu Raya Press in regaining its printing license were bound to have political implications.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ 'Singapore Political Report for January, 1951', CO 537/7342.

²⁷⁰ 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 28th January, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

²⁷¹ 'Singapore Political Report for January, 1951', CO 537/7342.

- **A YEAR OF HIGH DRAMA**

1951 was a year of high drama for the British intelligence services as well as the Colonial and Foreign Offices. They were on the alert for potentially dangerous developments in Singapore, which the Australian High Commissioner described as being in 'an atmosphere of tension.'²⁷² Adverse statements were expected from state authorities and Muslim organisations in Cairo that would bring about hostile reactions from other Muslim majority countries. Much to the relief of the British, the leaders of Arab countries refrained from expressing any views related to the Maria Hertogh case.²⁷³ The reactions of Muslims in South and Southeast Asia were quite different which, in effect, threatened Singapore's security.

In Kelantan, the voices that appealed for moderation were drowned out by a rapid escalation of anti-British feelings. Such sentiments were amplified by two radical groups.²⁷⁴ The first was a band of twenty young men in Kota Bahru who adopted the title *Nikat* (a Malay word which means 'to engage in acts regardless of expected consequences'). Commanded by Ismail bin Mohamed Salleh, a clerk at a local hospital, the group's objective was to kill selected Europeans who were involved in the Maria Hertogh case. Its supporters and sympathizers numbered eighty in all, one of the most prominent being Mustapha bin Mahmood, who was the brother-in-law of the Chief Minister of Kelantan. Another radical group originated from a small school outside Kota Bahru. A large number of its members were religious teachers and students who were financed by influential

²⁷² 'Annual Report for British Territories in South East Asia for the year 1951', A4231.

²⁷³ 'From Cairo to Foreign Office, 8th January, 1951', FO 371/93114.

²⁷⁴ *Majlis*, 19th December, 1950.

families within the state hierarchy. The main aim of this collective was to indoctrinate Malays in the nearby villages against British rule, which they regard as hostile to Islam. None of these groups had initiated any forms of violent acts, but their potency was not to be underestimated. The same degree of hostility towards the British was observed in Johore, and it was anticipated that such resentments would spill over to Singapore.²⁷⁵

British High Commissioner for Malaya, Henry Gurney, was informed of the conversion of two Malay blind children to the Christian faith in Penang. A precautionary note was sent by Dato Onn alerting the High Commissioner that the incident 'would arise [*sic*] more feeling than even the Nadra case and would be more difficult to handle, as there seemed to be no answer.'²⁷⁶ However, departing from the radicals in other parts of Malaya, Muslims in Penang came in aid of the British in allaying suspicions and unhappiness among those who had been informed of the conversions of the two children. In a widely publicised declaration, Muslim elites in Penang appealed to their brethren in Malaya and Singapore to work towards the re-establishment of peace and harmony with other races. At the same, they registered their despair over the arrest of Karim Ghani, and contributed large amounts of money to the Singapore Muslim League for legal expenses during the appeal trial.²⁷⁷

Together with these developments, public statements and protests by Muslims from other outlying Muslim countries were heightening emotions in

²⁷⁵ 'Political Summary-1st December 1950 to 31st January 1951 Part III – Colonial Territories – Singapore', CO 537/7346.

²⁷⁶ 'Extract from letter from Sir Henry Gurney to Sir Thomas Lloyd, 22nd December 1950', CO 537/7302.

²⁷⁷ 'Federation of Malaya – Political Report No. 1 for January 1951', CO 537/7341.

Singapore. During his meeting with the British ambassador in Jakarta, President Sukarno referred to the Maria Hertogh case 'as another serious political blunder of the West.' Muslims all over the world, the President maintained,

....regarded the marriage as a valid Moslem marriage which civil law could not in their conviction invalidate. The Court's riding roughshod over deep religious convictions had spread resentment throughout the Moslem world. This could not be dispelled by purely legalistic explanation and he feared that there might be unfortunate and far-reaching political consequences for Britain. He greatly regretted that this should be so.²⁷⁸

A number of non-governmental organisations and newspapers in Indonesia expressed strong and indignant views on the legal case and the riots. The Moslem Propagandist Front in Jakarta alleged that the Maria Hertogh legal controversy had brought about a widening 'gulf between the East and West' and urged Muslims to be mindful of the urgent need to defend their religion.²⁷⁹ This stance was supported by radical youth movements which were bent upon forwarding their grievances about Britain's suppression of nationalist movements to the United Nations.²⁸⁰ Another committee was formed to pursue an appeal in an international court of law. *Indonesia Raya*, an influential newspaper which was circulated in several Indonesian provinces, severely criticized the arrests of Muslims in Singapore and urged their immediate release. Other Muslim activists staged several anti-colonial protests at public places.²⁸¹

²⁷⁸ 'Djakarta (Batavia) to Foreign Office, 11th January, 1951', CO537/7302. See also FO 371/93114.

²⁷⁹ *Antara*, 12th January, 1951 and 'Djakarta (Batavia) to Foreign Office, 13th January, 1951', CO537/7302.

²⁸⁰ 'Federation of Malaya - Political Report No. 1 for January 1951', CO 537/7341.

²⁸¹ 'Djakarta (Batavia) to Foreign Office, 13th January, 1951', CO537/7302. See also *Utusan Melayu*, 15th January, 1951.

Similarly, the President of the All-Malaya Students Association in Mecca sent a letter of protest against the British handling of the legal case and their repressive measures against Muslims. The letter was published in Malay newspapers in Singapore. Several hundred copies were reported to have been sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies and selected religious and political leaders in Indonesia, the Middle East and South Asia.²⁸² Malay students in London established a 'Bertha Hertogh Committee' to win support for the appeal case in April and to agitate for an inquiry into conflicts between Islamic and secular laws.²⁸³ In Pakistan, all attempts by the government to mitigate the manufacturing of false news by the press proved to be counter-productive.²⁸⁴ A populist organisation in the country, Motamer-e-Alem-e-Elami, launched a protest against British handling of the legal proceedings and the arrest of Karim Ghani, who was to have led the Singapore delegation to the World Muslim Conference in Karachi. The organisation depicted British policies as yet 'another example of aggression of white people and of their interference with other religions.'²⁸⁵

Gimson initially held that the World Muslim Conference lacked the support of the Pakistani government, and therefore should not be regarded as a major threat. The event would provide an opportunity for the British Home Government to obtain the cooperation of the Pakistani authorities in clarifying the proper facts of the Maria Hertogh legal case. Conversely, Malcolm Macdonald perceived the Conference as a diplomatic threat, seeing that Muslim leaders who

²⁸² 'Extract from PMR No. 1 dated 31/1/51', CO537/7302.

²⁸³ *Antara*, 21st December, 1950.

²⁸⁴ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya: January -February, 1951', CO 537/7343.

²⁸⁵ 'United Kingdom High Commissioner in Pakistan to Singapore, 23rd January, 1951', CO 537/7302.

were vehemently anti-European had been invited to the event. As a proactive measure, he suggested that representatives from the Colonial Office be despatched to the Conference in order to present the Maria Hertogh case 'in its true light and make comments which would have a calming influence on Muslims in Malaya and elsewhere.'²⁸⁶ Plans were thus crafted for an Information Secretary, Mr Crichton, to be in Karachi for a few days before and during the conference. He was to be briefed about all facts and misperceptions among Muslims in Singapore. Part of his task was to send daily reports of the proceedings of the conference and other discussions that were conducted informally.²⁸⁷

It was a disquieting period for British officials in Singapore and in Britain. Prospective World Muslim Conference representatives from Singapore were closely watched. Towards the end of January, British intelligence services were informed of two nominees, the first being Mohammed Khan (the President of the Young Men's Muslim Association) who was described as a writer of 'an inflammatory article' in a banned newspaper, *Melayu Raya*.²⁸⁸ The other person identified was Syed Abdullah bin Yahya (President of the Arab Union) who had made prior arrangements to leave Singapore by plane on 7th February, 1951.²⁸⁹ Fully aware of the Special Branch's heightened role within the realm of Muslim affairs in Singapore, Bashir Mallal (the Secretary of the Muslim League) assured the British government that the two men would abstain from initiating any discussions that were deemed to be controversial by the colonial government. All

²⁸⁶ 'Malcolm Macdonald to High United Kingdom High Commissioner in Pakistan, 23rd January, 1951', CO537/7302.

²⁸⁷ 'Malcolm Macdonald to Foreign Office, 24th January, 1951', CO 537/7302.

²⁸⁸ *The Straits Times*, 19th January, 1951 and 'Singapore to U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan, 5th February, 1951', FO371/91208.

²⁸⁹ 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 17th January, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

opinions expressed by both men were based on their personal views, rather than the official views of any Muslim organisation in Singapore.²⁹⁰ Syed Ibrahim Alsagoff and a Chinese Muslim, Haji Ibrahim, were also expected to be in Karachi to attend the Conference.²⁹¹ Franklin Gimson, who had many past dealings with Syed Ibrahim, viewed him as rather 'conservative' but 'helpful' in explaining the true facts of the Maria Hertogh controversy.²⁹²

From 9th to 12th February 1951, the Muslim World Conference proceeded as planned with informal sessions held by Muslim leaders of varied nationalities and affiliations. News agencies from European and non-European countries covered the event and published day-by-day comments made by the attendees. Even Ahmadis and Shi'ite delegates, who were regarded by the Sunni majority as heterodox, were given the opportunity to air their views on the creation of a united Muslim front. Towards the end of the conference, a consensus was reached to the effect that the Muslim world should be a third and unified coalition in the face of the dominance of the Communist and Capitalist blocs. Several resolutions were passed:

- (1) That an act of aggression against one Muslim Country should be considered an act of aggression against all. (2) That Muslim peoples and Governments should unite to defend their tenets, peoples, holy places, and lands. (3) That Arabic be made lingua franca of Muslim countries, without prejudice to local languages. (4) That support be given to the stand taken by Muslims on Palestine for safeguarding their rights and launching a full struggle to meet the aggressor. (5) That Muslim governments be urged to direct their

²⁹⁰ *The Straits Times*, 19th January, 1951 and 'Singapore to U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan, 5th February, 1951', FO371/91208.

²⁹¹ 'Extract from PMR No. 1 dated 31/1/51', CO 537/7302.

²⁹² 'Franklin Gimson to U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan, 5th February, 1951', FO371/91208. See also FO 371/91179.

representatives at the United Nations to support the cause of the people of Kashmir, whose ties with the people of Pakistan no power on earth can break. (6) That the Security Council should take action over India's aggression, looting, and genocide in Hyderabad and Junagadh, and take steps to permit the holding of plebiscites in those territories. (7) That support be given to the demand of the people of the Nile Valley for the unity of the Valley and the withdrawal of the British troops of Sudan and the Suez Canal. (8) That the sufferings of the Muslims in Yugoslavia represent a violation of the principles of freedom and humanity.²⁹³

British officials in Singapore and London were informed that the 'Karachi World Muslim Conference passed off smoothly without any reference to the Riots or the Hertogh case.'²⁹⁴ The Foreign Office, Colonial Office and Singapore authorities were relieved but puzzled by the apparently deliberate omission of the Maria Hertogh case in the Conference's resolutions. The following report describes vividly the views of the British Foreign Office:

The Conference surprisingly, avoided another controversial subject, the Bertha Hertogh case, which might have aroused the spirit of Islamic fanaticism if it had been ventilated. It has been expected that the subject would be debated, especially as one of the prospective delegates from Malaya, Karim Ghani, had appointed the girl's "husband" as his private secretary for the Conference. The reason for the omission is not known, but the fact that Karim Ghani was unable to attend the Conference owing to his detention in Singapore following the riots of December 1950, may have affected the matter. The omission of the Bertha Hertogh case is more surprising in view of the anti-Western tendencies of some of the participants of the Conference.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ 'World Muslim Conference', FO371/91208. See also *The Times*, 15th February, 1951.

²⁹⁴ 'U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan to Malcolm Macdonald, 14th February, 1951', CO537/7302. See also, FO371/91208.

²⁹⁵ 'Recent Pan-Islamic Movements', FO 371/91250.

In an interview upon landing at the Singapore airport, Syed Ibrahim Alsagoff disclosed that 'though delegates, in their talks with him, had expressed sympathy with the views of responsible Muslims in Singapore, they had no wish to make the subject a matter for discussion.'²⁹⁶ The unexpected outcome of the Conference was followed by yet another positive development for the British. Sultan Abu Bakar of Pahang revealed his plans to organise visits and discussions with several influential Muslims in Singapore. He hoped to enjoin patience and self-restraint, as well as to advocate that the Maria Hertogh legal controversy should not be viewed as a religious issue.²⁹⁷

• MANSOOR ADABI AND THE APPEAL COURT CASE

In concert with its monitoring of the World Muslim Conference in Karachi, British intelligence was closely following the developments leading to the appeal court case in April. The appeal was lodged by Mansoor Adabi against the decision of Justice Brown on 2nd December 1950, which had infuriated and provoked Muslims in the Singapore to engage in street demonstrations. The appellants contended that the Lower Court had no jurisdiction to declare marriage between Mansoor Adabi and Maria to be illegal and void. Secondly, it was argued that Maria Hertogh had accepted Islam out of personal choice and conviction. Seen in that light, her marriage to Mansoor Adabi was to be deemed valid.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ *The Straits Times*, 16th February, 1951

²⁹⁷ 'Extract from PMR 2/1951', CO 537/7302.

²⁹⁸ See "In re Maria Huberdina Hertogh; Inche Mansoor Adabi v. Adrianus Petrus Hertogh and Anor, August 30, 1951", *Malayan Law Journal*, 17, (1951), p. 164.

Anxious about a recurrence of mass violence in the event of the appellants' defeat in the trial, the British sought the help of pro-British Muslim leaders. Secret meetings were organised 'to induce Adabi the husband of Maria to dissolve his marriage in accordance with the law of Islam.'²⁹⁹ Evidently, the British has ceased to be a neutral party between the Dutch and Muslims in the whole fiasco. Still, Mansoor Adabi was not deterred from pursuing the appeal in the Singapore High Court. The Special Branch tracked him during his visit to Kelantan, fearing that he would seek the support of Muslim elites in that state. Their suspicions proved to be incorrect. He was merely escorting Che Aminah who had familial ties with the Sultan of Kelantan.³⁰⁰ Mansoor Adabi himself was not unaware that he was the subject of British intelligence operations.³⁰¹ He was, however, determined to secure mass support and apply political pressure upon the British government during the appeal case. Nomination Day for new members of the Singapore Legislative Council on 8th March 1951 provided an excellent opportunity to pursue his aims.

The inclusion of additional non-European members in the second Singapore Legislative Council in 1951 was, in part, a subtle and planned strategy by the British to orchestrate the movement towards providing the locals with the responsibilities of managing the state. Nevertheless, a majority of those entitled to vote were sceptical towards what were seen as hypocritical gestures of the colonial state. 'Apathy, rather than violence,' wrote an Australian official who was based in Singapore, was 'the prevailing atmosphere of the elections.'³⁰² No

²⁹⁹ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 1st February, 1951', FO 371/93116.

³⁰⁰ 'Extract from PMR 2/1951', CO 537/7302.

³⁰¹ *Melayu Raya*, 3rd January, 1951.

³⁰² 'Results of Singapore Legislative Council Elections', A1838/1.

candidate from the Malay community took part in the elections, and such deliberate non-participation could be read as a form of passive and everyday resistance against the colonial regime.³⁰³ To a limited extent, Muslims in Singapore were represented by Indian Muslims such as Nazir Mallal and M.J. Namazie. Although the Indians were one of the smallest ethnic groupings on the island, they constituted more than half the total number of candidates. Contrary to British expectations, the texture of political parties in Singapore was non-communal. The Progressive Party and the Labour Front were notable examples of parties that sought to gain the popular votes by embracing a multi-racial outlook.³⁰⁴

Moments before the registration of candidates was closed, Mansoor Adabi enrolled himself as an Independent. The Special Branch was caught unawares which exhibits how comprehensive measures by any intelligence services are not at all fool-proof. '[I]ntelligence failures', Richard K. Betts argues, 'are not only inevitable, they are natural.'³⁰⁵ Muslim leaders, probably through the last minute plea of British officials, urged Mansoor Adabi to withdraw his candidature. After much persuasion, Mansoor Adabi relented and withdrew his name a mere five minutes before the list of candidates for the elections was formalised. When asked by bewildered reporters about his sudden change of heart, Mansoor Adabi explained that it was due to 'complications I cannot disclose.'³⁰⁶ A British

³⁰³ See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985) for a discussion of passive strategies adopted by ordinary people against state dominance.

³⁰⁴ Ampalavanar, *The Indian Minority and Political Change in Malaya*, p. 122. See also 'Singapore Legislative Elections, 16th April, 1951', RG 59, 746F.2/4-1651, NACPM.

³⁰⁵ Quoted in Micheal Herman, *Intelligence Power in Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 223-224.

³⁰⁶ 'Singapore Political Report for March, 1951', CO 537/7341 and 'William A. Langdon to Washington D.C., 10th March, 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/2-2851, NACPM.

political report noted that Mansoor Adabi's 'blood-stained cause celebre' would not have made for a peaceful election with his Appeal case pending.³⁰⁷

Another personality that came under the close scrutiny of the British intelligence for his participation as an Independent in the Legislative Council Election was M.A. Majid (President of The Muslim Welfare Association). A union activist and a co-founder of the Labour Party, Majid was a well-respected figure within the Muslim community due to his involvement in ensuring legal assistance for Che Aminah. He was later responsible for arranging the marriage between Mansoor Adabi and Maria Hertogh. In the weeks leading up to the Nomination Day, Majid appealed for Muslims in the colony to vote for him as part of the ongoing struggle for Maria Hertogh. But the tactic proved ineffective. He received a meagre ninety-five votes which constituted only four per cent of his constituency. Upon forfeiting his deposit, the British were convinced that Majid was no longer influential.³⁰⁸ To ensure that Malays in Singapore were still represented, the Singapore Governor nominated Ahmad Ibrahim, the legal representative for Mansoor Adabi, as an unofficial member of the Legislative Council.³⁰⁹

As the appeal court case drew near, key Muslim elites, who were concerned with the growing antipathy towards the colonial administration, requested Muslims in Singapore and the Federation of Malaya to maintain a calm attitude and to trust their leaders with the duty of ensuring that a fair judgement be

³⁰⁷ 'Appendix A: Report on Singapore Legislative Council's Election, April 10th, 1951', CO 537/7341.

³⁰⁸ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797 and 'Appendix A: Report on Singapore Legislative Council's Election, April 10th, 1951', CO 537/7341.

³⁰⁹ 'Results of Singapore Legislative Council Elections', A1838/1.

obtained. Nonetheless, radical elements within the Muslim community were opposed to all attempts to bring about a rapprochement. They viewed the appeal proceedings as a means to mobilize the masses towards the resort to violence. There was also a growing suspicion among politically inclined Muslims that the government was progressively asserting its influence upon the legislative process.³¹⁰

Sir Roland Braddell, a famous British lawyer in Malaya, along with Nazir Mallal and Ahmad Ibrahim, represented the appellants. Towards the end of March, Braddell informed the other legal representatives of his inability to depart from England due to ill-health. The earliest possible date of his arrival to Singapore was in early May. Reluctant to be deprived of his services, the appellants sought an adjournment of the appeal. But the request was categorically opposed by the Dutch solicitors for the respondents. Members of the quasi-governmental Muslim Advisory Board were manifestly distressed. Things came to a head when M.J. Namazie crafted a press release accusing the Dutch and the British of harbouring prejudices against Muslims. The letter was subsequently sent to numerous newspapers in the colony but was intercepted by the Special Branch following a tip off. Gimson regarded it 'as likely to endanger the maintenance of law and order and possibly provoke attacks on Dutch and other Europeans.'³¹¹ Acting upon the advice of the Attorney-General, the Public Relations Secretary warned newspaper editors in Singapore that any publication of the press release, or even a slight reference to the document, would lead to their

³¹⁰ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, April-May', CO 537/7343.

³¹¹ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 16th April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

prosecution for contempt of court.³¹² The Colonial Office in London was taken aback by Namazie's radical streak, as he had 'throughout these proceedings, taken a helpful and conciliatory line, should have not been guilty of such act of provocation and folly.' A copy of the press release was sent to selected politicians in the Netherlands by way of reminding them that an uncompromising stance on their part would lead to disastrous consequences in Singapore.³¹³ It is intriguing to note that the British did not consider the detention of Namazie for his outright show of resistance against the Dutch and the British. As a member of the Singapore Progressive Party and other community organisations, Namazie's leading position within the Singapore Muslim community was secure. The British were cognizant of the fact that the arrest of a person of his social standing would provide a convenient pretext for radical dissenters to incite the Muslims to action. The short episode was also a clear indication that no prominent Muslim elite on the island was to be left unmonitored.

In the interim, Nazir Mallal had become convinced that the Dutch were determined to proceed with the appeal in the absence of Braddell. A deceitful but logical method to buy time was for Mallal to absent himself on the day of the appeal, claiming to be in poor health.³¹⁴ The Singapore Governor was enraged. In his long telegram to the Colonial Office, Gimson expressed his annoyance at Mallal's devious stratagem. A close reading of the telegram clearly points towards the probable defeat of the appellants.

³¹² 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 16th April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

³¹³ 'John D. Higham to John D. Murray, 25th April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

³¹⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 17th April, 1951.

On the same day a letter went to you saying that Mr Mallal, Counsel for the appellant, might prove difficult in Court. I never anticipated, however, that he would descend to the low level of obtaining a medical certificate in order to have the case postponed. I don't think that I should be distorting the truth if I suggested that the Judges of the Court of Appeal entertain doubts as to the accuracy of the facts stated in the (Medical) Certificate.

The Judges have some difficulty now, in fixing a suitable date to hear the Appeal and are naturally not prepared to undergo any inconvenience themselves in fixing any date. June, or even more likely, September, are mentioned as possible dates for the future hearing of the Appeal. I hope Counsel for the appellant realizes that *the interests of their clients are likely to be prejudiced* owing to the fact that, at the time the Appeal is now heard, Maria Hertogh will have been in Holland in the company of her parents and her sisters and brothers, since December last [*italics mine*].³¹⁵

'Singapore', as an American observer noted, 'was twittering like a nervous bird over the possibility of a renewed outbreak of disorders among local Malays.'³¹⁶ The British reacted by publicizing reports on the extensive preparations and readiness of the police and army troops.³¹⁷ The newly appointed Commissioner of Police, John P. Pennefather-Evans, told reporters that, although no planned attacks had been uncovered, the police and the Special Branch were still taking all necessary precautions.³¹⁸ In Malaya, public interest on the Maria Hertogh case had substantially decreased. Likewise, there was a decline in fanatical agitation in Indonesia.³¹⁹ Yet a majority of the Muslims in South and Southeast Asia maintained that the lower court's decision in December 1950

³¹⁵ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 23rd April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

³¹⁶ 'Transmittal of General Conditions Report on the Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang Consular Districts for April 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/5-1951, NACPM.

³¹⁷ 'Political Summary-April 1951 Part III - Colonial Territories - Singapore', CO 537/7346. See also, FO 371/93116.

³¹⁸ *The Straits Times*, 16th April, 1951.

³¹⁹ 'William A. Langdon to Washington D.C., 10th March, 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/3-2851, NACPM.

should be publicly condemned. The Communists, on the other hand, sustained the policy of exploiting the legal controversy for the purpose of anti-Western propaganda.³²⁰

At the same time, the British had to muddle through rapid developments in the Netherlands, which had implications for Singapore's security. On 27th March 1951, the Breda Court declared that Maria Hertogh was a Dutch citizen and, therefore, under Article 86 of the Dutch Civil Code, she was to be considered as a child and her marriage was invalid. Neither Maria Hertogh nor Mansoor Adabi were present or represented during the proceedings. Following a request from the Dutch Public Prosecutor, who was acting upon the instructions given by Baron van Ittersum at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the case was adjourned in view of the appeal case which has yet to be heard at the High Court in Singapore. In his updates to the Foreign Office, Peter Garran at the British Embassy in The Hague expressed his hopes that the judgement of the appeal in Singapore would be in favour of Maria Hertogh's natural parents. 'Otherwise there may be tiresome complications.'³²¹ The reaction of a British official in London reflects the Home Government's worries about the outcome of the legal case. Replying to Garran's telegram, John D. Murray wrote that if the appeal was delayed further, it would most probably provoke another riot in Singapore. To safeguard their image and already tarnished position, the British Home Government should emphasise in its propaganda 'that the decision of the Dutch Court only relates to the decision under the Dutch law. It might also be possible *to make play with the fact* that the case would not have preceded the hearing of the appeal in Singapore if the latter had

³²⁰ 'Review of Islamic Affairs – First Quarter 1951', FO 371/91250.

³²¹ 'British Embassy (The Hague) to South East Asia Department (Foreign Office), 24th April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

not been adjourned at the request of the appellants [*italics mine*].³²² In addition to that, Murray's telegram provides us with deeper insights into British indirect influence upon the judicial process despite their rhetoric of neutrality. Murray wrote that it was 'more than probable that the Court on May 8th *will admit the Government's application* and declare the marriage null and void [*italics mine*].'³²³

Concurrently, dozens of Roman Catholic organisations in the Netherlands demonstrated in protest of the adjournment of the court proceedings. The Dutch High Court was issued with warnings to categorically invalidate Maria Hertogh's marriage with Mansoor Adabi. Failing that, Catholic support for the government would be called into question. In view of such fervent political debate, the term of office of Jacob van der Gaag (the Acting Consul-General of the Netherlands in Singapore) was extended until the end of the appeal trial, as he was deemed as acceptable to the Catholics in the Netherlands.³²⁴ The Breda court resumed its proceedings on 8th May 1951. A week later, the marriage between Maria Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi was annulled.³²⁵

Much to the astonishment of the British, no mass demonstrations were staged by Muslims in Singapore. Rather, Muslim leaders verbally resented the high-handedness by which legal decisions had been imposed by the Dutch court. The Chief *Kathi* of Singapore made a solemn avowal that persons who were responsible for the annulment of the marriage of Maria Hertogh and Mansoor

³²² 'John D. Murray to British Embassy (The Hague), 27th April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

³²³ 'John D. Murray to British Embassy (The Hague), 27th April, 1951', FO 371/93116.

³²⁴ 'Transmittal of General Conditions Report on the Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang Consular Districts for April 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/5-1951, NACPM.

³²⁵ 'Verdict of the Breda Court, 15th May, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Papers.

Adabi would soon be punished by God.³²⁶ In Malaya, Muslims were relieved by the delay of the appeal case. A majority were said to have tenaciously held on to the notion that the judiciary was subservient to the demands of the British government. There was also a pervasive impression that the British were siding with the Dutch against the Muslims in the interest of maintaining diplomatic relations with their European counterpart.³²⁷

In Indonesia, it was observed that public interest in the Maria Hertogh case had slowly subsided, yet the Special Branch kept track of organisations who were capable of instigating Malays in Singapore to launch another series of riots.³²⁸ A British intelligence report noted that the start of the fasting season in early June would further weaken public interest in the Maria Hertogh case. Describing the religious practise in a rather derogatory way, fasting was said to have brought 'its usual lassitude to the Malays. The Maria Hertogh case was forgotten, but interest in it may well be revived when the Appeal comes on for hearing in Singapore on 25th July.'³²⁹

Uniformed police doubled the number of onlookers at the Singapore High Court on the first day of the appeal hearing. Special Branch officers in plain clothes mingled with a crowd of bewildered Malay men and women, and at the same time, the Singapore Governor had ensured that extra troops were brought in

³²⁶ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, May-June 1951', CO 537/7343.

³²⁷ 'Political Summary-May 1951 Part II – Foreign Territories', A1838/278.

³²⁸ 'Political Summary-June 1951 Part III – Colonial Territories – Singapore', CO 537/7346.

³²⁹ 'Political Summary-June 1951 Part III – Colonial Territories – Singapore', CO 537/7346. The discourse on "laziness/lassitude" has been an integral part of British colonial perception of the Malays since the time of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles. Islam was seen as one of the factors that had brought about the culture of indolence. For a detailed discussion on this, see: Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Rethinking Raffles* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic: 2005) and Syed Hussein Alatas, *The Myth of the Lazy Native* (London: Frank Cass, 1977).

from Malaya and put on standby in the city to quell possible disturbances should the appeal be dismissed.³³⁰ By the second day of the proceedings, the number of persons had decreased to the extent that the public gallery in the courtroom was almost empty.³³¹ Although most Malays who were present felt that the appeal was bound to fail, Indian Muslims maintained that Mansoor Adabi would emerge triumphant at the end of the legal battle. The hearing lasted for five days. Public interest in the case declined sharply in the weeks that followed because Muslims in Singapore and Malaya were preoccupied with the appeal for clemency for those who had been sentenced to death for committing murder during the riots.³³²

Judges of the Singapore High Court gave their verdict on 30th August, 1951. They contended that the court had the jurisdiction to consider the validity of the marriage in order to determine whether the appellant had established a prior right to the custody of Maria Hertogh. The judges did not, however, see the necessity of deciding whether Maria was a Christian or a Muslim. They readily conceded that Maria Hertogh was a Muslim rather than a Christian by faith at the time of the marriage. It is enticing to suggest that such a discursive strategy was subtly employed to bring to a close an arena of contestation which might enliven the hostility that Muslims had shown towards the colonial government. The judges further argued that under both the English and Dutch legal systems, the capacity of a woman to be married was governed by her *Lex Domicili* (the law of the place of a person's domicile). Maria Hertogh's father was Dutch and hence she was

³³⁰ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, March-April', CO 537/7343.

³³¹ 'Reuter Report, 31st July, 1951', CO 953/10/6 and *The Straits Times*, 31st July, 1951.

³³² 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, 15th July – 15th August, 1951', CO 537/7343.

subject to the laws of the Netherlands, which held that she was below the legal age of marriage. In sum, Mansoor Adabi's appeal had been rejected.³³³

British intelligence observed that the 'Muslim public appeared to take the result of the Appeal as a foregone conclusion.'³³⁴ The Special Branch were however vigilant of many who subscribed to the assumption that the government had it all planned from the onset; a conspiracy *par excellence*. With the exception of several instances of non-violent resistance, conspiracy theories did not bring about aggressive behaviour on the part of Muslims in Singapore. A notable example of non-violent resistance was that of a Malay Special Constable who was on duty at the rear gate of Government House in the days after the decision of the appeal was made known. Seemingly unhappy with the verdict, the Malay Special Constable expressed his opposition towards the British by shouting in English, 'We want Mariah back as a Muslim, if not....'³³⁵ Concomitantly, the British Foreign Office was informed that Muslims in Singapore had sought the help of a renowned Pakistani lawyer, Syed Ahmad Rafiq, who was studying the case so as to pursue another appeal, this time to the Privy Council in October.³³⁶ The British predicted that such plans would be abandoned, since the economically depressed minority could not, by any means, meet the steep expense of such an appeal.³³⁷ They were wrong.

³³³ 'In re Maria Huberdina Hertogh; Inche Mansoor Adabi v. Adrianus Petrus Hertogh', p. 167 and p. 173. See also, *Utusan Melayu*, 31st August, 1951.

³³⁴ 'Singapore Political Report for August, 1951', CO 537/7342.

³³⁵ 'Singapore Political Report for August, 1951', CO 537/7342.

³³⁶ 'R.A. Burrows to L.ET. Storar, 26th September, 1951', CO 953/10/6.

³³⁷ 'Singapore Political Report for August, 1951', CO 537/7342.

- **RESIDUES OF MUSLIM RESISTANCE**

At a meeting held in November 1951, the Nadra Action Committee arrived at a consensus that an appeal would be brought to the Privy Council in England. The main intent of the appeal was legal rather than political. Although the Committee accepted the fact that the personal case of Mansoor Adabi and Maria Hertogh was closed, their overriding and long-term concern was to seek clarifications on legal issues related to marriages between Muslims and potential converts. A clear judgement on this issue could only be obtained from the highest echelons of the British judicial system, which would thereby set the precedent for other Commonwealth nations.³³⁸ The colonial administration in Singapore was perplexed as to whether such manifest objectives were free from latent gambits. There was also the ominous possibility that the appeal would accentuate adverse reactions from other Muslim countries and, in effect, be perceived as yet another example of the lack of respect for Muslim customs and laws. The Special Branch was tasked to unravel the underlying agendas. Meetings with key Muslim leaders were arranged to extract crucial information.

On the 31st of December 1951, the Foreign Office was informed that the Nadra Action Committee would contend that the Singapore High Court had no jurisdiction to consider the validity of the marriage as a preliminary issue to the question of custody. The Committee alleged that the court had misinterpreted the provisions of Islamic law relevant to the question of what law should govern the

³³⁸ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, 15th November – 15th December, 1951', CO 537/7343. See also 'Extract from Malaya Federation EXCO Minutes, 20th November, 1951', CO 953/10/6.

capacity of a child to be lawfully married.³³⁹ In view of this, officials in the Colonial Office and Singapore were instructed to combat the propaganda of 'Muslim Extremists' by giving widespread publicity to the verdicts passed by the Singapore High Court. 'You should, if necessary, emphasise that the issue was essentially a legal one and that the appeal to the Privy Council will likewise be based purely on points of law.'³⁴⁰

Along with the appeal to the Privy Council, the Security Liaison Officer in Singapore listed three other issues that could rekindle ill-feelings towards the government in the midst of a progressive dismantling of radical movements in the colony. The first was that of the fate of Othman Ghani, whose appeal for clemency had been rejected by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.³⁴¹ Malay activists were of the opinion that the passing of death sentences upon Othman Ghani and several others were colonialist attempts to avenge the brutal murders of their servicemen. A Malay political party was reported to have planned a major disturbance in the event of the court's refusal to reduce the death sentences to that of imprisonment.³⁴² Prominent Indian Muslims maintained that the laws of the country have been violated, as Othman Ghani's role was only to supply food to Muslims who were arrested for rioting. The Special Branch was also informed of an Indian Muslim's visit to Pakistan in an attempt to influence government officials in Karachi to protest against the draconian laws used by the

³³⁹ 'D. Macfarlane (Foreign Office) to S.H. Evans (Colonial Office), 31st December, 1951', FO 371/93117.

³⁴⁰ 'D. Macfarlane (Foreign Office) to S.H. Evans (Colonial Office), 31st December, 1951', FO 371/93117.

³⁴¹ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, 15th December 1951 – 15th January, 1952', CO 537/7343. See also, FO 371/101223.

³⁴² 'Singapore Political Report for December 1951', CO 1022/206.

British to intimidate their subjects.³⁴³ Muslim resentment at the continued detention of Karim Ghani, purportedly the chief agitator behind the December 1950 riots, was the second item in the list of issues affecting the security of the colony. On top of that, the British were confronted with protests that were launched against the screening of a film entitled, *David and Bathsheba*.³⁴⁴ The dynamics of this incident will be revisited in greater depth in Chapter Five of this thesis. Suffice it to state at this juncture that the British intelligence services maintained that Muslims in Singapore were exploiting 'every incident such as the Hertogh case, the case of those convicted in the subsequent riots and the showing of the film *David and Bathsheba* to move major Muslim pressure upon Government policy.'³⁴⁵ Due to such developments, the Singapore Governor was advised to further strengthen the Malay-Indonesian Section of the Special Branch.³⁴⁶

By February 1952, the danger of Muslim extremism related to the Maria Hertogh controversy had abated. The texture of intelligence reports on Muslim Affairs was generally positive, and it was even reported that Muslims in Singapore no longer saw violence as a means to achieve their political objectives. Attended by about one hundred Indians, Pakistanis and Malays, the annual general meeting of the Singapore Muslim League came under the control of 'moderate' leaders who were able to mitigate the pressures of 'extremist' elements.³⁴⁷ M.J. Namazie was re-elected as the President of the organisation and Karim Ghani was

³⁴³ 'Extract from PMR, 12/1951', CO 953/10/6.

³⁴⁴ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, 15th December 1951 – 15th January, 1952', CO 537/7343. See also, FO 371/101223.

³⁴⁵ 'Singapore Political Report for January 1952', CO 1022/206.

³⁴⁶ 'Extract of Minutes of Malaya/Borneo Governors' Conference, 15th January, 1952', CO 1022/429.

³⁴⁷ 'Singapore Political Report for February 1952', CO 1022/206.

reinstated as one of the Patrons. Although Che Sidek, the President of the Singapore Malay Union and a Justice of the Peace, was voted in as one of the Vice-Presidents, he announced publicly that he would not accept the appointment. The British were astonished by Namazie's ability to control 'rowdy elements among the South Indian supporters of Karim Ghani who had prepared several resolutions calling for steps to be taken to obtain his release. The final motions were comparatively mild. Karim Ghani now applied to go to India where he was born. Negotiations are in hand.'³⁴⁸

Mansoor Adabi's application for leave to appeal was yet again dismissed on 22nd February, 1952. Justice Rogers of the Supreme Court maintained that there were no valid reasons for the appeal to be brought to Her Majesty in the Privy Council.³⁴⁹ As a follow up to this, the Secretary of the Malay Students Organisation in Karachi sought the assistance of three of the largest Islamic organisations in Pakistan to review the rejection of the appeal. The World Muslim Organisation in Pakistan went a step further to debate the issue on 14th and 15th March, 1952.³⁵⁰ Nonetheless, Muslim activism related to the Maria Hertogh controversy were centred mainly upon peaceful dialogue rather than militant action. In Singapore, *Jamiyah* had begun extensive preparations for another Southeast Asia Missionary Conference towards the end of 1952. It was expected that the Maria Hertogh case would not be mentioned, or, if it was, only in passing.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ 'Extract from PMR, 2/1952', CO 1022/424.

³⁴⁹ *The Straits Times*, 23rd February, 1952.

³⁵⁰ 'Extract from PMR, 3/1952', CO 1022/434.

³⁵¹ 'Political Report for Fortnightly ending 30th September, 1952', CO 1022/206.

At this juncture in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots, a change in perception and portrayal of Muslims in Singapore was developing within the British intelligence circles. Though the strict racial formula of 'Malay', 'Indian' and 'Arab' prevailed, a lucid report on Muslim communities in the post-war period that will be quoted at length below could also be read as a nuanced attempt by the intelligence services to uncover the underlying factors which had resulted in the varied forms of resistance which they had encountered thus far. The key objective of the document was to make a once-neglected community, 'legible'.³⁵² Also, the report exhibited a departure from the assumption that Islam in Singapore was entirely non-violent and apolitical. If left unmanaged, the religion could be used as a rallying tool to mobilise the masses against colonial state.

The Malay Community of Singapore is depressed and lacks leaders. The atmosphere of Singapore is not the best milieu for the Malay 'adat' (way of life) and both the local Malay and the Indonesian immigrant suffer from the destabilising influences of mercantile cosmopolitanism. In these circumstances Indonesian radical influences have penetrated and may develop the political potential in these people. As Muslims, they fall to some extent under the influence of the religiously more fanatical and politically more active Indian/Pakistani elements.

Islam is the most potent religious force in the region. In Singapore it assumes a political character in that South Indian Muslim elements seek to influence policy by playing upon Muslim susceptibilities but are held in check by Arab and Malay moderation and orthodoxy.

³⁵² James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 1.

The Indian sub-continent has a long tradition of connection with the region. The local community resulting there from is the most politically conscious group in Singapore. The partition of their homeland following religious division and the present political situation there enhances the possibility of local communal disturbances but generally the political assertiveness of the Indo-Pakistani character find expression in local politics which it aspires to take the lead [*italics mine*].³⁵³

• CONCLUSION – NEW THREATS AND OLD ENEMIES

By 1953, the spectres of the Maria Hertogh case had slowly yet painfully faded from the Singapore Muslim community's collective psyche. Different it was in the case of the British who were still haunted by vivid memories of the incident. In August, the Special Branch was thunderstruck by the news of the conversion of a sixteen-year-old Chinese Roman Catholic to Islam and her subsequent marriage to a Malay man. The British were anxious that press publicity of a reincarnation of the Maria Hertogh case would reawaken Muslim-Christian ill-feeling and 'develop into a security danger'.³⁵⁴ Such fear proved to be unwarranted because the Muslim public paid no particular attention to the incident.

In the months that ensued, the focus of British intelligence activities gradually shifted towards other developments within the local Muslim community. Espionage was conducted to obtain information on subversive elements within UMNO, the Peninsula Malay Union and other Malay organisations, which promoted independence by radical means. These

³⁵³ 'Resume of the Singapore Political Scene, May 1952', CO 1022/206. Chinese-Muslims were, however, left out of this report perhaps due to the small number of registered Chinese converts to Islam at that time.

³⁵⁴ 'Political Report for the period 13th August to 1st September, 1953', CO 1022/207.

developments were suspected to have had a strong influence upon Muslim military and police officers in Singapore, who had maintained strong networks with political activists in the Malayan Federation.³⁵⁵ Beyond the politics of independence, the British were also aware of a revival and upsurge of interest in the ideology of Pan-Islamism that was enmeshed with the ideals of nationalism. Muslim students who returned from their studies and sojourns in Cairo and Mecca were active in spreading anti-British and Pan-Islamic ideas in Malaya. Although numerically insignificant, such persons were deemed to be potential threats to security in Singapore. The British intelligence services also monitored numerous visits by Inamullah Khan (President of the Pakistani Youth Movement), which were hosted by prominent Muslims in Singapore. Whilst no signs of anti-colonialist feelings had arisen from these visits, the British did not discount that speeches made by such personalities could bring forth sentiments which 'may be latent and could easily be touched off, as was shown in the Hertogh case.'³⁵⁶

To ensure that these negative influences would be swiftly dealt with, the British keep a watchful eye on students who had returned from their studies in major Muslim countries, as well as radical *ulama* and renowned personalities who converged in Singapore *en route* to Mecca during the pilgrimage season.³⁵⁷ Yet, no untoward incidents related to the Maria Hertogh case were reported towards the closing of 1953. Indeed, through a combination of 'proscription' and 'surveillance', the British had anticipated and successfully obliterated all forms of

³⁵⁵ 'Review of Factors Liable to Affect Internal Security, Singapore, as on 1st October, 1953', CO 1022/248.

³⁵⁶ 'Review of Factors Liable to Affect Internal Security, Singapore, as on 1st October, 1953', CO 1022/248.

³⁵⁷ 'Review of Factors Liable to Affect Internal Security, Singapore, as on 1st October, 1953', CO 1022/248.

violent and radical opposition arising from the Maria Hertogh riots, which had previously fuelled racial and religious dissensions. The next chapter of this thesis will discuss the process of 'self-criticism' as the third strategy which the British employed to expose the failures of key personalities during the outbreak of the riots. Although an embedded trait of the British Empire, self-criticism, as will be shown, was channelled towards insulating the higher echelons of the colonial administration from suffering a severe loss of legitimacy.



Wilfred L. Blythe, Singapore Colonial Secretary
Source: National Archives of Singapore



Franklin Gimson standing with a Gurkha Police Officer
Source: National Archives of Singapore

CHAPTER 5

Self-Criticism

The ability to incessantly engage in self-criticism was, arguably, one of the most distinctive features of the British Empire. So pronounced was such trait that even the former American Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, has recently observed that Britain has 'an amazing capacity for self-criticism, even when the Empire was at its height.'³⁵⁸ Motivated by the endeavour to prolong Britain's hold upon its territories, colonial officials from all political leanings would unceasingly reproach themselves - above all others - in the event of crises and upheavals. Certainly, there were a selected few who resisted the self-criticising trait and, in the process, governed despotically. Such dissenters would always be challenged by liberal critics within the British and colonized societies.³⁵⁹

This chapter seeks to describe, contextualise and analyse the British strategy of 'self-criticism' as manifested primarily in the establishment and proceedings of the Commission of Enquiry and the disciplinary measures meted out to colonial officials accused of mishandling the Maria Hertogh riots. It is my contention that whilst the British were self-critical and were generally receptive of criticisms launched against them, they ensured that the higher echelons of the state machinery were insulated from a severe collapse in their legitimacy in the

³⁵⁸ Donald Rumsfeld quoted in: *The Guardian*, 2nd June, 2003.

³⁵⁹ Colin Cross, *The Fall of the British Empire: 1918-1968* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), p. 144 and Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made The Modern World* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. xxiv.

aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. The politics, tensions and anxieties inherent within this limited process of self-criticism will be brought forth.

• A WINTER OF DISCONTENT

Public discontent began to mount upon the quelling of the riots, to the extent that the American Consul-General predicted that it would precipitate the fall from favour of several high-ranking British officials in Singapore.³⁶⁰ Queries on the causes and factors that led to the death of British civilians and servicemen during the riots were raised in Britain by a whole array of newspaper editorials. At the same time, British opposition parties seized upon the opportunity to publish commentaries condemning the Home and Singapore governments for the breakdown in governance during the riots, and the subsequent delays in the setting up of a commission of enquiry.³⁶¹ It is pertinent to note here that, aside from providing updates on the progress of the Malayan Emergency, the British media seldom gave extensive coverage of other incidents of violence in Malaya during the immediate post-war period. The aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots was exceptional in the sense that it became a topic of debate within several leading newspapers in Britain.³⁶² *The Daily Express* and *The Daily Telegraph* featured the riots as a symptom of the Labour government's growing ineptness in managing racial and religious differences in the colonies.³⁶³ *The Manchester Guardian* went so far as to aver that the 'British administration in Singapore is

³⁶⁰ 'William R. Langdon to Department of State, 15th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1550, NACPM.

³⁶¹ 'Franklin Gimson to Oliver Lyttelton, 16th December, 1950', CO 537/7246.

³⁶² John Michael Lee, *Colonial Development and Good Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 241.

³⁶³ *The Daily Telegraph*, 13th December, 1950 and *The Daily Express*, 13th December, 1950.

never again likely to enjoy the affection of the Malays which it undoubtedly had before the war. We must pay for the defect of the post-war emergency government.³⁶⁴ A *Singapore Standard* editorial declared that the whole episode was a 'blunder' that revealed an apparent lack of ability on the part of the colonial government to identify and address the outstanding socio-political grievances in the colony.³⁶⁵ To be sure, such voices of opposition towards British administrative failures in the colonies were characteristic of the years following the Second World War. Frederick Cooper observes that colonial regimes 'in the 1950s were moving targets for criticism, for they sought to reposition themselves in a progress-oriented world.'³⁶⁶

In an effort to shore up the growing mood of discontent, on 16th December 1950, the Singapore Governor declared in public that a full enquiry into the circumstances that had led to the riots would be held upon the approval of the Home Government.³⁶⁷ Indeed, although the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots was only one among many outbreaks of mass violence which the Britain had dealt with during the post-war period, colonial officials in London were more than convinced that a 'full-dress enquiry' needed to be carried out in order to unravel the defects of colonial policing in one of its most strategic outposts.³⁶⁸ Still, it was the 'men on the spot' rather than the metropolitan officials and politicians who took on the much of the task of engaging in self-criticism and responding to critics of the colonial regime.

³⁶⁴ *Manchester Guardian*, 13th December, 1950.

³⁶⁵ *Singapore Standard*, 15th December, 1950.

³⁶⁶ Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2005), p. 37.

³⁶⁷ *The Straits Times*, 17th December, 1950.

³⁶⁸ Jeffries, *The Colonial Police*, p. 203.

In a speech delivered at a Legislative Council meeting, the Singapore Governor asserted that 'as servants of the public, the government gladly accept the responsibilities of their public position in the days of bad fortune as well as of good and welcome responsible judgment on their administration.'³⁶⁹ Gimson further conceded that it was more than appropriate for the government to accept criticisms levelled against the police force, for they had been caught off guard by the sudden occurrence of mass violence that claimed the lives and property of innocent persons. In point of fact, the police force was deemed inefficient, fraught with defectors who supported the rioters, and thus an object of ridicule. An editorial in the *Straits Budget* newspaper, as a case in point, even went to the extent of labelling it a 'Sissy Force'.³⁷⁰ To Gimson, the heavy blame placed on an essential part of the colonial administration was unsurprising, as the duty of the police force was essentially on the 'front-line'. The Singapore Governor commended the military for restoring order in the colony.³⁷¹ More worrying, however, were stories 'circulating throughout Singapore but no picture, as yet, can be drawn of the situation in the Colony in those dark days of Monday and Tuesday.' Gimson highlighted that rumours and distortion of facts would further threaten the volatile relationship between the colonial state and the general public. Having invoked the Inquiries Commission Ordinance of 1941, he announced that an enquiry would be duly carried out. Close communication had been established with the Secretary of State for the Colonies on the composition as well as the terms of reference of the enquiry. Some time would elapse to allow for a proper selection and for the arrival of the members of the commission of enquiry to

³⁶⁹ 'Speech by His Excellency the Governor for Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19th December, 1950', CO 953/10/1.

³⁷⁰ *The Straits Budget*, 21st December, 1950.

³⁷¹ 'Speech by His Excellency the Governor for Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19th December, 1950', CO 953/10/1.

Singapore.³⁷² Reiterating Britain's role as what Gerold Krozewski had aptly termed as, 'Gentlemanly Imperialist'³⁷³, Gimson ended his speech by stating that the 'prime responsibility lies with the government, and, learning from the past and from whatever judgment is passed on us, the government will see the tools are apt to the job and the job is done.'³⁷⁴ This was all well said, but what was left to be done was more complex than it seemed to be. The time lag in establishing the Commission of Enquiry was one the most trying periods for the British colonial officials in London and Singapore, given that self-criticism on the part of the government did not necessarily appease the outraged and exasperated public.

The first source of criticism emerged from among the members of the Singapore Legislative Council. Nazir Mallal reviled the colonial government for its poor conduct and inefficiency in the wake of the violence in the colony, and blamed the 'miles of red tape' that had brought about the rapid spread of riots. Questions were posed as to whether the Singapore Colonial Secretary and the Commissioner of Police had attended a cocktail party in Johore Bahru during the riots, which implied that the two colonial officials had failed to appreciate the seriousness of the violence that ensued. Almost immediately, the Singapore Colonial Secretary denied all accusations made against him and his subordinate, insisting that they were not in Johore Bahru.³⁷⁵ Picking up from his earlier points, Nazir Mallal reiterated that, although Muslims were peaceful and law-abiding

³⁷² *The Singapore Free Press*, 19th December, 1950 and 'Speech by His Excellency the Governor for Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19th December, 1950', CO 953/10/1.

³⁷³ Gerold Krozewski, "Gentlemanly Imperialism and British Empire after 1945", in Shigeru Akita, *Gentlemanly Capitalism, Imperialism and Global History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 83-100.

³⁷⁴ *The Singapore Free Press*, 19th December, 1950 and "Speech by His Excellency the Governor for Legislative Council on Tuesday, 19th December, 1950", CO 953/10/1.

³⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th December, 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B452-453 and *The Singapore Free Press*, 15th December, 1950.

citizens, they would unflinchingly sacrifice their lives and property in the face of encroachments by the government upon their religious customs and beliefs.

‘Could anything’, Nazir Mallal contended,

be more offensive to Muslim feelings than placing the young lady, who, according to the Muslims, was a *Muslimah* (Muslim lady) and will always remain so in their eyes, in a Christian Home?...What is the use of having Advisory Boards if you do not consult them or pay heed to the advice they may give you?...The confidence of the public in our Police Force has been completely shattered, and I do not think that this public confidence in the police force as at present can ever be restored.’³⁷⁶

A Eurasian member of the Legislative Council, P.F. de Souza, highlighted that the general public was still baffled by the placement of Maria Hertogh in a Catholic Convent. The Dutch Acting Consul-General should be made to testify as a key witness during the course of the enquiry in order to clear up the misunderstandings that had arisen. Other members of the Legislative Council, such as Tan Chye Cheng, stressed that the Commission of Enquiry should consist of individuals who were independent of the government. The candidates should also possess credentials that would engender the trust of all communities within the Singapore society. Tan also hoped that ‘the Commission of Enquiry will be accorded adequate protection, and not be subjected to the indignities suffered by our local courts recently.’³⁷⁷ By way of concluding the proceedings, the Singapore Colonial Secretary thanked the council members for their assistance in assuaging the conflicts that have surfaced since the riots. The Public Relations Office had

³⁷⁶ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th December, 1950*, p. B471-472.

³⁷⁷ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th December, 1950*, pp. B470-473.

been tasked with responsibility of allaying negative perceptions towards the government and its agencies. Blythe acknowledged the call by Sardon Jubir for all Muslims and non-Muslims to work together towards alleviating misperceptions and a culture of suspicion. The riots would be the last of their kind in the colony. All forms of violence directed against the colonial state would be met with severe punishments. 'This is no declaration of war, but a declaration of a determination to defend and to maintain the civic peace.'³⁷⁸ Interestingly, no voices of opposition were noticeable at this point. Even Malay newspapers, such as *Utusan Melayu* and *Melayu Raya*, which were active in fuelling anti-colonial feelings in the midst of the legal tussle, refrained from commenting on the proceedings of the Legislative Council.

The situation was very different in England, which saw the emergence of another stream of criticism against the British government. One of the British newspaper commentaries that came to the attention of the Colonial and Foreign Offices' concern was entitled 'Angry Singapore', written by a reporter based in Singapore. Published in the *Yorkshire Post*, J.W. Goodwin wrote that the delay in investigating the causes of the riots was, in part, a deliberate attempt by the government to 'whitewash' officials in Whitehall and in Singapore. Contrary to prevailing perceptions, Goodwin maintained that the passiveness of the Malay Police during the riots was not the result of them having been influenced by radical ideas. 'The plain fact is that one group of uniformed Malays under British officers did its duty, where another group of uniformed Malays refused to obey its British officers.' The Commission of Enquiry, Goodwin asserted, ought to address

³⁷⁸ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th December, 1950*, p. B478. See also, *The Singapore Free Press*, 20th December, 1950 and *The Straits Times*, 20th December, 1950.

the reasons for the failure to forewarn the necessary governmental agencies on the rising emotions of Muslims many days before the riots. Secondly, it should provide a clear account of the failure of the police to disperse the rioters outside the Supreme Court and the total collapse of police morale unbeknown to the senior officers of the force. The poor recruitment and training procedures as well as corrupt practices in the police force was the third important issue that should be brought to fore. Next, was the intrinsic weakness of the civil administration in Singapore and incompetence of key officials at Whitehall. Goodwin demanded an explanation for the delay in sending reinforcements from the military, which had offered its services twice during the riots. The government had also deprived the media of its right of access to vital sources of information. Army officers were given strict orders to avoid communicating with the press, failing that, they would be court-martialled. The police force, in turn, was silenced through the agency of the Public Relations Office. Goodwin ended his scathing commentary by stating that 'the Colony's administrators must be glad that they are not Ministers under a representative government; they would have been out of office by this time.'³⁷⁹ Whilst British officials were kept abreast of several important issues arising from the plethora of commentaries and critiques published in England, they did not seek to respond in kind. Much energy was, however, directed towards hastening the selection of the members of the Commission of Enquiry.

³⁷⁹ *Yorkshire Post*, 1st January, 1951. See also FO 371/84677.

• THE POLITICS OF ENQUIRY

The process of determining the appropriate candidates for the Commission of Enquiry was, in essence, problematic. As Micheal Keith has accurately pointed out, commissions of enquiry 'exist in a political environment and are implicated in a political strategy from the moment at which they are appointed and their personnel selected to the moment in which they report, right on the manner in which they are remembered.'³⁸⁰ In a telegram sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the Singapore Governor stressed that members of the commission of enquiry should be fully aware of the Islamic factor embedded within the Maria Hertogh controversy. They should be acquainted with the fact that the riots had received widespread publicity and reactions from Muslims in Malaya, Indonesia, Pakistan and the Middle East. The Commission of Enquiry should also be sensitive to the pervasive perception among Muslims that the judiciary had been made subservient to the demands of the Executive. A majority was also of the view that the laws of Islam had been insulted upon the annulment by the British Court of a marriage performed by a Muslim *kathi*.³⁸¹ Restating the views of Tan Chye Cheng, Gimson mentioned that the members of the Commission of Enquiry should also be free from prior contacts with, or from having familial relations with any government officials in Singapore. This was to avoid unnecessary accusations regarding the conduct of the investigation. The Chairman of the Commission should be a Legal Officer of high standing, with credentials that 'command

³⁸⁰ Michael Keith, *Race, Riots and Policing: Lore and Disorder in a Multi-Racist Society* (London: UCL Press, 1993), p. 74.

³⁸¹ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 8th January, 1951', CO 537/7246.

attention not only in Singapore but elsewhere and should not be suspect owing to the fact that he had previous association with Malaya.’³⁸²

Several prominent persons were proposed to be appointed as the Chairman of the Commission. James Griffiths recommended Sir Harry Trusted, who had had prior experience as the Chairman of the Salaries Commission. John D. Higham of the Colonial Office suggested Sir Charles Gerahty, who was a renowned judicial officer based in India. Gimson was unimpressed. To him, Trusted was a man who lacked vision and was not well-received in Malaya. Geraghty had the advantage of an image of impartiality due to his long absence from Malaya. But the general public, Gimson argued, was looking forward to the appointment of a person with greater legal eminence. The Singapore Governor added that the remaining positions within the Commission should consist of persons with strong credentials and prior experience in British colonies.³⁸³

At this juncture, tensions between the Governor, the Secretary of State for the Colonies and officials at the Colonial Office began to develop. James Griffiths held on to the ideal that it was ‘of the greatest importance to the British position in the Far East in these troubled times that public opinion should be satisfied, by a report of indisputable impartiality and authority, that this whole question has been thoroughly and relentlessly investigated.’³⁸⁴ Higham was in full support of Griffiths’ notions but was bothered by Gimson’s irresoluteness in selecting the proposed candidates for the Commission. Confiding to a fellow official of his displeasure towards Singapore Governor, Higham wondered whether Gimson had

³⁸² ‘Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 8th January, 1951’, CO 537/7246.

³⁸³ ‘John D. Higham to Mr Paskin, 9th January, 1951’, CO 537/7246.

³⁸⁴ ‘James Griffiths to Alderman J.C. Burman, 12th January, 1951’, CO 537/7246.

in mind a 'Colonial Chief Justice who is unknown to the people of Singapore (in whom familiarity therefore will not have contempt).'³⁸⁵

In truth, the fifty-two year old Gimson was deeply anxious of being publicly criticised for poor choices in the selection of the members of the Commission of Enquiry. His term as the Singapore Governor had, by far, been plagued with successive crises that resulted in a rapid loss of public reverence for his office. In April 1950, Gimson narrowly escaped an assassination attempt when a grenade struck his leg and rolled about six feet away, where it exploded.³⁸⁶ This was succeeded by the Maria Hertogh riots, which exposed serious defects in his leadership. The deliberate attempt to influence the selection of candidates could thus be seen as part of Gimson's tactic of preventing further public denigration as the date of his retirement drew near.

After much wrangling, on the 16th January, 1951, the press was provided with the terms of reference for the Commission of Enquiry: 'To inquire into and report on the recent disorders in Singapore on 11th December, and subsequent days, with special reference to the causes of those disorders, and to the measures taken to protect life and property and to restore law and order.'³⁸⁷ The Singapore Governor emphasized that persons of high credentials and experience had been selected, in accordance with the demands of the Singapore populace. The committee for the Commission of Enquiry had been given the right to summon any person to come before it and to investigate all matters relevant to the enquiry.

³⁸⁵ 'John D. Higham to Mr Paskin, 9th January, 1951', CO 537/7246.

³⁸⁶ 'Attempted Assassination of Sir Franklin Gimson, Governor of Singapore', CO 537/5964.

³⁸⁷ 'Riots: Singapore; Report of Commission of Enquiry: Leach Report (1951)', CO 537/7248. See also *The Straits Times*, 17th January, 1951.

Its key function would be the collection and reporting of facts. The onus was placed upon the Executive and Legislative Councils to translate the Commission's recommendations into viable policies.³⁸⁸ A week later, an announcement was made in London in the House of Commons that the committee for the Commission of Enquiry into the Maria Hertogh riots would be led by Sir Lionel Leach, who was a member of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and a former Chief Justice of Madras. He was to be assisted by Captain H. Studdy (the Chief Constable of the West Riding) and J.H. Wenham from the Surrey County Council, who was the Chairman of the Police Standing Joint Committee for that county. J.R. Williams was appointed as the Secretary of the Commission.³⁸⁹

Together with this was the preparation of the list of persons to be interviewed by the Commission of Enquiry. In an endeavour to impress upon the public his commitment to governmental impartiality, Gimson assured that no one was above the scrutiny of the Commission, with the exception of himself due to the British legal concept of sovereign immunity.³⁹⁰ Friends and respected colleagues thus became suspects and scapegoats. Even Robert E. Foulger, the fifty-two year old Streatham-born Singapore Commissioner of Police, who had retired on November 1950, was made to testify before the Commission. As a justification for such a contentious move, Gimson explained to James Griffiths that Foulger should be flown from England and provide evidence before the Commission 'both in his own interest and in the interests of the Singapore public.

³⁸⁸ *The Straits Times*, 17th January, 1951.

³⁸⁹ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797.

³⁹⁰ See John Roland Braddell, *The Law of the Straits Settlements: A Commentary* (Singapore: Kelly & Walsh, 1932), pp. 98-101.

In fact there will almost certainly be public criticism if he fails to do so.³⁹¹ On the same week, Foulger's impending appointment as the Deputy Inspector-General for the Colonial Police was abruptly postponed due to the Home government's fear of negative repercussions arising from the report of the enquiry.³⁹² Such a stratagem on Gimson's part is a vivid example of how colonial officials had so often turned the tables against their close subordinates when the need arose. Barely a month prior to the riots, Gimson had praised Foulger for the

arduous task which you undertook when you re-established the Police Force which had been severely disorganised as a result of the Japanese Occupation and which had deteriorated almost beyond recognition from the fine Force which the people of Singapore remembered in the pre-war days....Your name will be remembered with affection and with admiration not only among the Police Force of Singapore but among all law-abiding citizens of this Colony as one who by his vigour and promptness and considerable initiative made the Singapore Police Force's second to none in the Colonial Empire...It is through your guidance and encouragement that such progressive innovations as the use of radio cars, the introduction of Women Police, the advancement and promotion of Asian officers to higher ranks and to courses in the United Kingdom, and more important still, the introduction of a policy of assimilating Chinese into the Police Force have been successfully adopted.³⁹³

Even Major-General Dunlop, the 'celebrated hero' who had commanded the troops which quelled the riots, acknowledged Foulger's abilities and admitted that he 'could not have found a better Commissioner or a firmer friend.'³⁹⁴ Yet the pertinent issue at stake transcended past acquaintances and friendships. A

³⁹¹ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 13th January, 1951', CO 537/7245.

³⁹² 'Secretary of State for the Colonies to Robert E. Foulger, 16th January, 1951', CO 537/7245.

³⁹³ 'Franklin Gimson to Robert E. Foulger, 17th November, 1950', CO 537/7245.

³⁹⁴ 'Major-General D. Dunlop to Robert E. Foulger, 7th November, 1950', CO 537/7245.

high-ranking British official would have to shoulder much of the blame for mishandling the two dreadful days in December. The question that lingered at the back of everyone's mind then was, 'Who?'

In the meantime, newspaper editorials, both in Singapore and in Britain continued their censure of the government. *The Straits Budget* expressed its scepticism of the Commission's ability to comprehensively reconstruct the causes and events that led to the riots. The failure of the government before and during the riots, which should be the core subject of investigation, would most certainly be neglected, if not, blanked out. The government could now use the Commission as a tool to evade crucial questions from the public as 'it can say nothing for fear of prejudicing the Commission's work.'³⁹⁵ In England, *The Times* newspaper stated that the formalisation of the Commission of Enquiry had not alleviated the sense of danger and fear among Europeans and Eurasians living in Singapore. Close and continued cooperation with the Malays and other Muslim communities had been shattered and the enquiry could not reverse such phenomena.³⁹⁶

The Commission of Enquiry held its opening session on 14th February, 1951. The first witness was G.R. Livett, the Deputy Commissioner of Police who, in his testimony, acknowledged the embedded weaknesses of the police force. Livett was of the view that the riots would not have spread beyond the vicinity of the Sultan Mosque if a policy of patience and restraint had been implemented. He blamed the military forces for attacking the crowd, inducing widespread acts of

³⁹⁵ *Straits Budget*, 18th January, 1951.

³⁹⁶ *The Times*, 23rd January, 1951.

violence.³⁹⁷ Greatly disturbed by the self-defeating effects of Livett's testimony, the newly appointed Commissioner of Police, John P. Pennefather-Evans, arranged for an informal meeting with members of the Commission. He proposed that police officers be represented by civilian lawyers during the course of the enquiry. Gimson was taken aback. 'I fear however,' repeating the issue twice over in a single telegram to John Higham, 'that a private lawyer would not have that sense of restraint and regard for the general interests of the public which are necessary in this very delicate investigation.' To counter Pennefather-Evans' proposition, the Attorney-General was asked to arrange for an urgent meeting with members of the Commission. A suggestion was mooted that the Crown Counsel, rather than a private lawyer, should be employed for the purposes of protecting the interests of police officers testifying before the Commission.³⁹⁸ The Singapore Governor's strategy gained the upper hand. In a follow-up telegram, Gimson admitted that he would have asked the Colonial Office 'to interfere in this matter' had the ploy failed.³⁹⁹ The politics of the Commission of Enquiry had gained full momentum.

Livett's testimony and that of several other officers reinforced the established notion that the Malay policemen, who constituted a majority in the Singapore Police Force, had failed in their task to ensure the enforcement of law and order during the riots. The chief underlying reason for the Malay policemen's ineffectiveness was their deep sympathy towards the resentment felt by their co-religionists. Another plausible reason was the lack of coordination between police officers that were deployed in crisis-stricken areas with those stationed at the

³⁹⁷ 'G. R. Livett's Commission of Inquiry Testimony', CO 953/46.

³⁹⁸ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 15th February, 1951', CO 953/10/1.

³⁹⁹ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 15th February, 1951', CO 953/10/1.

Police Headquarters. The police were also faced with overwhelming difficulties in handling the rioters encountered in various parts of the city.⁴⁰⁰

On 19th February 1951, Nigel Morris, the Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of the CID, delivered the first wrenching blow to the integrity and image of selected civilian officials. Morris testified before the Commission that he had insisted on the transfer of Maria Hertogh to a Social Welfare Home several days before the riots. This was based upon feedback received from Special Branch officers who had observed the growing Muslim hostility arising from Maria Hertogh's placement at the Convent of the Good Shepherd. The Singapore Colonial Secretary had, however, consistently rejected his advice. For that reason, Morris sought the cooperation of other high-ranking civilian officials but all to no avail.⁴⁰¹ Morris' account was supported by the testimony of A.E.G. Blades (the Assistant Commissioner of Special Branch) and retired Assistant Superintendent Mahmood Abdul Wahab, who repeatedly emphasized their role in urging the removal of Maria Hertogh from the Catholic Convent, with the sole intent of mollifying the opinion of Muslims in the colony.⁴⁰² Their recommendations were rejected by Blythe who insisted that the placement of Maria at the Convent 'was a very reasonable thing to do' and that he did not see the need to consult Muslim leaders on the matter.⁴⁰³

⁴⁰⁰ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, February 1951', CO 537/6797 and *The Straits Times*, 14th February, 1951.

⁴⁰¹ 'Nigel Morris' Commission of Inquiry Testimony', CO 953/46 and *The Straits Times*, 20th February, 1951.

⁴⁰² 'A.E.G. Blades' and Mahmood Abdul Wahab's Commission of Inquiry Testimony', CO 953/46.

⁴⁰³ 'Wilfred Blythe's Commission of Inquiry Testimony', CO 953/46.

The second exposure of the failure of civilian officials in the performance of their duties came from the former Acting Commissioner of Police, R.C.B. Wiltshire, who took the stand to testify on 23rd February, 1951. Wiltshire had submitted his letter of resignation several days before the commencement of the Commission of Enquiry to enable himself to testify without having being bound by the code of ethics of a police officer and a servant of the colonial state. The Singapore Governor saw through cleverly crafted scheme and bluntly rejected the resignation.⁴⁰⁴ During the two days of intense questioning, Wiltshire confessed that he was acting under the direct orders of the Singapore Colonial Secretary during the worst days of the riots. The Singapore Colonial Secretary, Wiltshire explained, had been tasked to manage the violence that had erupted in Singapore from the time when the Governor was at the Commissioner-General's residence in Johor Bahru. No reasons were given for the delay on the part of the governor in returning to Singapore on the second day of the riots. The Chairman of the Commission then asked whether such a procedure was appropriate in the circumstances. Wiltshire replied, 'I think so, Sir.'⁴⁰⁵ Wiltshire later divulged that he had also refused the military assistance that was offered on two occasions by Major-General Dunlop on the second day of the riots.⁴⁰⁶

The last, yet not least, damaging evidence came from Foulger who shed light on corruption that was rampant in the police force due to low pay and long working hours. These problems, along with internal rivalry and poor coordination between the higher echelons of the police force, had been brought to the attention

⁴⁰⁴ 'Transmitting General Conditions Report for the Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang consular districts for the period February 1-15, 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/2-2851, NACPM.

⁴⁰⁵ *The Straits Times*, 24th February, 1951.

⁴⁰⁶ *Singapore Standard*, 27th February, 1951.

of the Singapore Colonial Secretary prior to Foulger's departure from the force. Although several reforms had been proposed and initiated, the process was severely hampered by a lack of support from civilian officials.⁴⁰⁷

The Commission then proceeded to St. John's Island to obtain the testimony of six Muslim detainees who were alleged to have inflamed Muslim feelings prior and during the riots. All except for Karim Ghani agreed to testify. Their statements were recorded on camera and none admitted to the charge that they were proponents of violence and disorder. Foreign observers in the colony were bewildered by the Commission's attempt at obtaining crucial information from detainees who had not been given a fair trial by a British court. 'Did this action in any way imply a criticism of the authorities for detaining these persons so long without trial? Or did it merely mean that the Commission desired the testimony of these important witnesses in order to complete their picture of the events which led to the disorders in December?'⁴⁰⁸ The answers to such pertinent questions were never found.

In England, newspaper coverage of the testimony of leading officials in Singapore provided politicians from the Conservative Party with the pretext to find fault with the Labour government's management of the colonies. During a House of Commons debate, Frederick Burden questioned the late deployment of military troops to quell the riots in their early stages. Burden demanded an assurance from the Secretary of State for the Colonies that military forces would

⁴⁰⁷ *Singapore Standard*, 27th February, 1951 and 'Robert E. Foulger to Thomas Lloyd, May 26th, 1951', CO 537/7245.

⁴⁰⁸ 'Singapore Riots Inquiry: A Study in Responsible Government', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1951, NACPM.

be promptly activated in the event of another major riot. Another Conservative Member of Parliament, Arthur Harvey, asked for the earliest date by which the investigation of the Commission of Enquiry would be completed. James Griffiths explained that the causes and factors that led to the riots had yet to be fully uncovered. The government would not commit itself to Burden's proposition. In response to Harvey, Griffiths wryly noted that the 'gallant Gentleman will have seen from Press reports, the Commission have begun their work and are taking evidence.'⁴⁰⁹

The Commission of Enquiry held its last session on 9th March, 1951. All in all, a total of 136 police officers, government servants, Muslim elites and members of the public had been interviewed. Investigative tours were conducted in the areas where the riots had taken place. Several films of riot incidents and an anti-riot drill were also assessed. Members of the Commission arrived in England on 6th April and completed their report on the first week of May.⁴¹⁰ *The Straits Times* noted that the enquiry was 'a demonstration of the public's rights and of the duty of government to account for its action, it is a profound tribute to an administrative system which is more often abused than praised.'⁴¹¹ The American Consul-General thought otherwise. In his view, the Commission had failed to obtain fundamental facts from the Singapore Governor who, as the most prominent figure in the Colony, could not be placed under oath because of the legal principle that 'the King can do no wrong'⁴¹² Likewise, the Acting Australian

⁴⁰⁹ *Hansard*, Vol. 482, 21st February, 1951, pp. 1276-1277.

⁴¹⁰ 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, April - May 1951', CO 537/7343.

⁴¹¹ *The Straits Times*, 3rd March, 1951

⁴¹² 'Singapore Riots Inquiry: A Study in Responsible Government', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1951, NACPM.

Commissioner for Malaya, L.R. McIntyre, remarked that the Commission had concentrated mainly on its second term of reference, that is, 'the measures taken to protect life and property and restore law and order.' It was more than certain that the failure of the police force would constitute a large portion of the final report. Much blame for the riots, in McIntyre's view, should have been attributed to the inefficiency and political oversight of the civilian officials in Singapore. Not a single one of those officials had considered seeking the help of Muslim leaders to defuse Muslim ill-feelings towards the government, which had developed many months before the riots. The government had also 'no proper plan ready for meeting an emergency of this sort.'⁴¹³

Unsure yet concerned with the likely texture of the report, Griffiths, Higham and Gimson maintained regular correspondence with members of the Commission as the writing proceeded. When advance copies of the document were sent to the Colonial Office, Griffiths and Higham maintained that the future of Blythe was 'rather black' and that 'there is nothing in the conclusions which would prima facie reflect on the Governor (except possibly paragraph 21, by implication).'⁴¹⁴ On 17th May 1951, the report was flown to Singapore.⁴¹⁵ Gimson received prior information that he was free from blame, but he remained apprehensive of indirect references to his poor leadership during the riots. None was to be found. Confident of the fact that he had now been absolved of blame for the riots, Gimson sought to challenge various parts of the report which exposed the ineffectiveness of those under his charge. Selected personalities whom the

⁴¹³ 'L.R. McIntyre to The Secretary, Department of External Affairs, Canberra, 20th March 1951', A1838/283.

⁴¹⁴ 'John D. Higham to Mr Paskin, 5th May, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴¹⁵ 'Lionel Leach to Franklin Gimson, 17th May, 1951', CO 537/7247.

Singapore Governor had hoped to protect were thus provided with copies of the report for the purposes of exposing misinformation in the document, and to offer alternative viewpoints. Two copies of the document were delivered to Malcolm Macdonald and Henry Gurney for their perusal.⁴¹⁶ A battle of words and wits within the colonial officialdom had begun.

• THE BATTLE OF WORDS AND WITS

The most vitriolic critique of the report came from Wiltshire, who sent a long memorandum to officials in Singapore and Britain in defense of the measures that he and senior officers in the Police Force had undertaken during the riots. Wiltshire asserted that the members of the Commission were not perceptive of the manifold dilemmas faced by police officers when confronted with unruly mobs. The main aim was to limit the scale of collateral damage. Seen in this light, the police force had performed to their fullest abilities. At the end of his abjuration of the document, Wiltshire recommended that public access to the defective enquiry report be restricted.⁴¹⁷ Upon assessing Wiltshire's critiques, Higham opined that the memorandum would contribute nothing to the more urgent process of refining the Commission's report. 'I think it is only charitable to consider some passages of it as a product of an overwrought mind!'⁴¹⁸

From June 1951 onwards, a series of amendments were made arising from comments and criticisms within governmental circles. Representatives from the

⁴¹⁶ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 26th May, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴¹⁷ 'Copy of Memorandum dated 2nd July, 1951 addressed, under secret cover, to James Griffiths on the Invitation to make representations on the Report of the Leach Commission dated 17th May, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴¹⁸ 'John D. Higham to Franklin Gimson, 13th July, 1951', CO 537/7247.

military, for example, requested that the words 'General Headquarters is not in Federation', an expression that would have made them appear unprofessional, be changed to 'He telephoned to General Headquarters and asked Headquarters Malaya District, in the Federation, to send et seq.'⁴¹⁹ The Commission acquiesced to the proposed amendment. Although he had anticipated criticisms from the press should the publication of the report be delayed, the Singapore Governor was unable to accept more than twenty points 'inclusive and which follow immediately after paragraph 176 thereof', which he felt, would further diminish public confidence in a number of civilian and uniformed officials.⁴²⁰ Gimson rejected the suggestion that the Singapore Colonial Secretary was to be publicly censured for having failed to take heed of the advice given by the police force. The exercise of power to remove Maria Hertogh from the Convent of the Good Shepherd was dependent upon the authorisation of the civil court. Such power was not conferred upon the Singapore Colonial Secretary and the Commission of Enquiry had completely misjudged Wilshire's 'undoubted sincerity.'⁴²¹ The second line of contention was that K.L. Johnson (the Acting Vice-Commissioner of Police) was not to be held responsible for what was purported to be an ineffective deployment of the Gurkha contingent. To the contrary, Johnson ensured that the Gurkhas were deployed at crucial points adjacent to the Sultan Mosque, which was the best course of action in such circumstances.⁴²² Thirdly, Gimson disputed the assertion that the CID 'erred in failing to make an early search of the Mosque which was the focal point of the rioting throughout.' The task of clearing the streets of rioters was the duty of uniformed policemen, not the

⁴¹⁹ 'Franklin Higham to James Griffiths, 1st June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴²⁰ 'Statement on the Singapore Riots Enquiry Commission, 1st June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴²¹ 'Statement on the Singapore Riots Enquiry Commission, 1st June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴²² 'Statement on the Singapore Riots Enquiry Commission, 1st June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

CID. The C.I.D had, however, taken on a more logical move by seeking the support and co-operation of Muslim leaders to disperse the crowds. In connection with this, the Commission was wrong to assert that the Sultan Mosque was the focal point of the rioting. The throwing of bottles and other small-scale violence at the mosque on the evening of 12th December was insignificant when compared with attacks on civilians and damage to property in other parts of the island. A notable case in point was the riots in Geylang which proved to be more fatal than those in other areas. It was spurious, Gimson argued, to posit that the Japanese Occupation had had an adverse effect on governmental officials, resulting in their inability to effectively manage cases of mass violence.⁴²³ Reforms at all levels had been implemented since the liberation of Singapore in 1945, which had brought about the restoration of efficiency and discipline within the Civil Service. To drive home his points, Gimson requested that his disassociation from selected contents of the report was to be published simultaneously with the final version of the document.⁴²⁴ Having studied Gimson's contentions, coupled with the Maria Hertogh appeal case pending in the months that followed, the Colonial Office postponed the publication of the report.⁴²⁵

The announcement of the delay in publication led to tangled debates and wild speculations over the report's contents and reliability. Reporters from leading newspapers in Singapore tried to obtain inside information on the contents of the report but were frustrated by the colonial state's effective measures in limiting all

⁴²³ Even Higham noted that "...I dislike very much the conclusion 21 on page 46 of the Report about the effects of Japanese occupation; but here again the way in which the adverse effects of this conclusion are to be offset is a question for the Governor to consider in the first." See 'John D. Higham to Thomas Lloyd, 26th May, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴²⁴ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 1st June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴²⁵ Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, June – July, 1951', CO 537/7343.

discussion of the report to closed circles. It was predicted that the report would emerge as a 'best seller'. To make matters worse, rumours were circulating that the failings of some prominent British officials would be exposed.⁴²⁶ One uninformed observer suggested that the Singapore Governor had been severely reviled and, hence, was manipulating parts of the report which exposed his poor leadership. In a meeting that was attended by community leaders in Singapore, Dr. C.H. Withers-Payne (the President of the Singapore Association) called for the immediate publication of the report. Withers-Payne remarked that the 'tardiness in placing the commission's findings before the public is not in the public interest.'⁴²⁷ Even the members of the House of Commons in Britain were oblivious of the internal debates pertaining to the findings of the Commission of Enquiry. When asked by Niall Macpherson from the Conservative Party when was the earliest date on which the report would be published, James Griffiths responded that the onus was placed upon the Singapore Governor to examine the report and decide on the appropriate date for publication.⁴²⁸

Meanwhile, tensions between British officials in Britain and the Singapore Governor became more intense, due to the latter's agitation for further amendments to be made to the report. Thomas Lloyd (the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Colonial Office) went to the extent of reminding Gimson that, whilst he was aware that the Governor was the best judge of the anticipated public reaction to the report, Gimson should also take into consideration that reports of a quasi-judicial nature were usually accepted by ministers in Britain

⁴²⁶ *The Straits Times*, 29th May, 1951. 'Singapore Riots Inquiry: A Study in Responsible Government', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1951, NACPM.

⁴²⁷ *The Straits Times*, 12th June, 1951.

⁴²⁸ *Hansard*, Vol. 482, 6th June, 1951, pp. 999-1000.

without comment. Correspondingly, Higham highlighted that any departures from the findings of the Commission should be limited to matters that were pertinent. Trivialities, such as the use of certain terminologies and sentence structures, should be avoided.⁴²⁹ Sir Lionel Leach, the Chairman of the Commission, who was evidently upset with the scores of criticisms levelled thus far, defended the report in its entirety. He stressed that there was 'abundant evidence to support every finding of fact made by the Commission and its primary duty was fact finding.'⁴³⁰

Gimson was not deterred from pursuing his line of arguments. He admonished the Secretary of State for the Colonies that

the public generally will, I feel sure, be as disappointed as I am with the Report. My immediate advisers agree with me that the Report discloses that the enquiry was superficial in character, that no real attempt was made to investigate deficiencies of the police force or emergency organisation, and that too much attention was paid to almost irrelevant issues. Nor has it brought to light anything of which the Government was not aware before the Commission began its enquiries.⁴³¹

In a follow-up telegram to Thomas Lloyd, Gimson strove to set aright what he saw as the erroneous claims made by Foulger in a letter sent to the Colonial Office. Foulger, according to Gimson, had wrongly assumed that the riots were the product of a shortage of well-trained senior officers and constables in the police force. The number of officers in the police force was more than sufficient for the management of law and order in the colony and it was Foulger who

⁴²⁹ 'James Griffiths to Franklin Gimson, 19th June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴³⁰ 'Note by Sir Lionel Leach', CO 537/7247.

⁴³¹ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 21st June, 1951', CO 537/7247.

‘appears to be suffering under a delusion in this connection.’⁴³² Gimson repeated his request to make further alterations in the report, so as to insulate several men under his charge from public censure. After a heated debate between Higham, Griffiths, Lloyd, Leach and Gimson, the report was reworded and distilled, though the core conclusions remained intact. The Singapore Governor was permitted to publish his personal disagreements to be included as part of the report’s appendices.⁴³³

The Report of the Commission of Enquiry, popularly known as the ‘Leach Report’, was published on 7th August, 1951. Having been modified in accordance to the politics of the time, it is unsurprising that Leach Report failed to provide a balanced or definitive account of the causes and events that led to the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots. The central purpose of the Leach Report, Mary Kilcline Cody suggests, ‘seems more didactic than investigatory and it may be seen as a lesson for colonial governments rather than an attempt to establish the causes of the riots.’⁴³⁴ Going beyond this, I would argue that the Commission of Enquiry had failed to pose a basic yet crucial question: Why did the riots occur in some localities, yet not in others? Due to such oversight, the Leach Report made no reference to the socio-economic marginalization, deprivation, alienation and grievances of the Malays and other communities, which could well explain the mass participation and rapid spread of the riots in the villages, ghettos and other suburban parts of Singapore. It is noteworthy to highlight that such social problems have already been made apparent by an influential Malay newspaper, the *Utusan Melayu*, some few months before the commencement of the

⁴³² ‘Franklin Gimson to Sir Thomas Lloyd, 26th June, 1951’, CO 537/7246.

⁴³³ ‘Riots: Singapore; Report of Commission of Enquiry: Leach Report (1951)’, CO 537/7248.

⁴³⁴ Cody, “Mis-Fits in the Text”, pp. 103-104.

Commission of Enquiry. According to the newspaper editorial, a large number of youths who participated in the riots originated from slums and dilapidated kampongs, which revealed that the outbreak of violence was closely linked to the social conditions of the Malays and the inadequacy of governmental policies towards them.⁴³⁵ Indeed, the British were oblivious of the correlation between mass violence and the socio-economic marginalization of the local community. They had only become aware of the predicament during a Governors' Conference which was held in the following year, when issues pertaining to Muslims in Singapore were deliberated at length.⁴³⁶ In corroboration with the analysis of *Utusan Melayu*, Stanley Lieberman and Arnold Silverman state that riots were prevalent in major cities of the post-war period especially 'when social institutions function inadequately, or when grievances are not resolved under the existing institutional arrangements. Populations are predisposed or prone to riot; they are not simply neutral aggregates transformed into a violent mob by the agitation or charisma of individuals. Indeed, the immediate precipitant simply ignites prior community tensions revolving around basic institutional difficulties.'⁴³⁷

The Leach Report attributed the outbreak of the riots to a few key factors. Foremost among them was the intense feeling which developed within the Muslim community in Singapore arising from the court verdict regarding the custody of Maria Hertogh. Another aggravating factor was Maria Hertogh's stay at a Roman Catholic Convent, which heightened suspicions that there had been prior plans forcibly to convert the girl to Christianity. The third cause was the publicity given

⁴³⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 20th and 21st December, 1950.

⁴³⁶ 'Extract of Minutes of Malaya/Borneo Governors' Conference, 15th January, 1952', CO 1022/429.

⁴³⁷ Stanley Lieberman and Arnold R. Silverman, "The Precipitants and Underlying Conditions of Race Riots", *American Sociological Review*, 30, (1965), p. 897.

by the press on the legal case and Maria Hertogh's life at the Convent. Muslim hatred of the Europeans and Eurasians in the colony was further intensified by public statements and speeches made by the 'Nadra Action Committee', whose chief members were Karim Ghani, Dr. Burhanuddin, Mohammed Taha bin Kalu, Syed Ali Al-Attas, Darus Shariff and Mohammed Mustaza. A large portion of the document was devoted to providing intimate details on the role of the police force. The report ascribed the riots to the failure of the Malay police in particular and to the police force as a whole for having failed to anticipate the possibility of an outbreak of mass violence and to employ necessary force at an early stage. This prompted the rioters 'to take it as a sign of weakness' which resulted in the spread of riots from the area just outside the Supreme Court to other parts of the city. Comprehensive reforms were recommended to remedy the problems of weak leadership, corruption, poor discipline, disorganisation and low morale within the police force.⁴³⁸

• VILLAINS AND SCAPEGOATS

Crucial parts of the Leach Report were published verbatim by newspapers in Singapore. Along with headlines such as '4 Top Officers Blamed' were pictures of R.C.B. Wiltshire, G.R. Livett, K.L. Johnson and W.J. Parks. In opposition to these negative portrayals, Major-General Dunlop was praised for his foresight and command of the military during the riots.⁴³⁹ Two leading Chinese newspapers, *Nanyang Siang Pao* and *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, both commended the report for its impartiality. The *Utusan Melayu* refrained from issuing any comments, aside from

⁴³⁸ 'Riots: Singapore; Report of Commission of Enquiry: Leach Report (1951)', CO 537/7248.

⁴³⁹ *The Straits Times*, 7th August, 1951.

reporting the essential findings of the Commission.⁴⁴⁰ In Britain, the Leach Report was published on the front pages of the *Manchester Guardian*, the *News Chronicle*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Herald*. Replicating the views of most newspapers in the country, the *Manchester Guardian* depicted the document as 'devastating' and 'extraordinary' because 'there was hardly a branch of the administration in which the commission had not unearthed failures.'⁴⁴¹

When viewed from the perspective of the senior police officers, the summer of 1951 coincided with the beginnings of their struggle for self-preservation. Having risked their lives in the line of duty and, on many occasions, been decorated with medals attesting to their bravery and good conduct, their heroic status had been called to question. Instead, they were portrayed as 'villains' for having failed to perform the duties expected of them in the course of the riots. The first victim of the colonial administration's endeavour to preserve the legitimacy of its higher command was Foulger. He was denied his anticipated promotion to the post of a Deputy Inspector-General of the Colonial Police. The Secretary of State for the Colonies maintained that 'Foulger's advice in this capacity would not be immediately and readily acceptable to other Police Forces, particularly those in the Far East.' Faithful to his oath to the British Empire and, in part, determined to redeem his honour, Foulger requested a re-appointment as the Commissioner of Police in Singapore.⁴⁴² Gimson was unwilling to accept what seemed to him as an outlandish and impractical proposition. Although he acknowledged Foulger's past contribution in re-establishing the Singapore Police Force following the Japanese Occupation, Gimson maintained that Foulger's re-

⁴⁴⁰ *Utusan Melayu*, 7th August, 1951.

⁴⁴¹ *Manchester Guardian*, 7th August, 1951.

⁴⁴² 'Thomas Lloyd to Franklin Gimson, 9th June, 1951', CO 537/7245.

appointment would stifle the rapid progress of reforms arising from the plans that had been laid by Pennefather-Evans. Moreover, Pennefather-Evans had regained the respect and trust of the Malay rank and file, which had deteriorated upon the outbreak of the riots. 'Whether Foulger could possibly rejoin the police after the departure of Pennefather-Evans must depend to a large extent on public reception of the conclusions of the Riot Enquiry Commission.'⁴⁴³ In point of fact, Foulger was barred from holding any position in the Singapore Police Force by order of the Colonial Office. He was offered a minor post in Tanganyika 'to remove any feeling that he has been harshly treated.'⁴⁴⁴ Subsequently, Gimson took it upon himself to publicly criticise the former Acting Commissioner of Police. Wiltshire was alleged to have failed to relay crucial information needed in order for the Singapore Colonial Secretary to come to a firm decision on the first day of the riots.⁴⁴⁵

This marked the start of the *mêlée* between uniformed and non-uniformed officials of the colonial administration as well as members of the general public. In an interview with a *The Straits Times* correspondent in London, Wiltshire commented sarcastically that '[n]inety-eight pages and a mention of Wiltshire on nearly every one...I only wish I could state my case at the same time as this report - I know places where they will be lapping it all up - but I am still in the Force and cannot say a thing.'⁴⁴⁶ Pennefather-Evans joined in the debacle by stating that any actions by police officers in the event of riots and other acts of violence were 'liable to be censured later. He is liable to be blamed for using too little force or

⁴⁴³ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 26th June, 1951', CO 537/7245.

⁴⁴⁴ 'Franklin Gimson to Thomas Lloyd, 20th July, 1951', CO 537/7245.

⁴⁴⁵ *The Straits Times*, 7th August, 1951.

⁴⁴⁶ *The Straits Times*, 8th August, 1951.

too much.⁴⁴⁷ In the same week, several notable elites from the European and Eurasian communities in Singapore stressed that the report had wrongfully blamed police officers who were placed in near-death circumstances when confronted with the armed rioters.⁴⁴⁸ Prominent Chinese leaders also expressed their unhappiness at the report's censure of Wiltshire, contending that former Acting Commissioner of Police had been made 'a scapegoat' to cover up the misdeeds of higher-ranking British officials in the colony. An anonymous member of the public wrote that the government could not escape 'from the fact' that during the opening stages of the riots, 'the government never took any leading part.'⁴⁴⁹

Against all odds, Gimson remained adamant in defending Wilfred Blythe by stating explicitly his disagreement with the Leach Report's censure of the civilian official under his charge. Blythe's responsibility for the mishandling the riots, according to Gimson, was still 'open to interpretation.'⁴⁵⁰ At the same time, the Singapore Colonial Secretary provided the Home government with his version of the episode, alleging that newspaper reports on his role in placing Maria Hertogh in the Catholic Convent were no less than false. Rather, it was the Dutch Acting Consul-General, Jacob van der Gaag, who declined his appeal to remove Maria Hertogh from the Convent.⁴⁵¹ Van der Gaag had also refused the application for an interview with the Commission of Enquiry, giving the excuse that representatives 'of a foreign government would act correctly by not meddling

⁴⁴⁷ *The Straits Times*, 9th August, 1951.

⁴⁴⁸ *The Singapore Free Press*, 7th August, 1951.

⁴⁴⁹ *The Straits Times*, 8th August, 1951.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Straits Times*, 7th August, 1951.

⁴⁵¹ 'Minute by the Colonial Secretary – Singapore Riots Enquiry Commission', CO 953/10/6.

with any domestic affairs unless he would receive an explicit and formal request to do so.⁴⁵²

Discussions on the contents of the Leach Report and the subsequent disciplinary measures meted out to four senior police officers were deliberated upon in the Legislative Council on 21st August, 1951. Gimson anticipated dissent but the reverse held true.⁴⁵³ It was probably one of the most sober sessions since the Council was established in 1948. Four motions were proposed by the Singapore Governor:

'(1) That this Council having read and considered the Report of the Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission 1951 accepts the findings of fact made by the Commission except in cases where evidence was not available to or was not placed before the Commission and now requests the Government to take such further action against the Government Officers and servants inculpated by the said Report as may be necessary and proper.

(2) That this Council, as representing the people of the Colony of Singapore, tenders to Major General Dunlop and to the officers and men under his command its heartiest thanks for restoring law and order in Singapore on the 11th and 12th December 1950, during the partial breakdown of the Civil Government.

(3) That this Council deeply deplores the incidents referred to in Part XXI of the Singapore Riots Inquiry Commission Report and particularly in sections 173, 174 and 175 which are calculated to diminish almost to vanishing point the public confidence in the Singapore Police Force and especially its senior ranks.

⁴⁵² 'Jacob van der Gaag to Wilfred Blythe, 6th July, 1951', CO 953/10/6.

⁴⁵³ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 9th August, 1951', CO 537/7247.

(4) That this Council disassociates itself from the contents of the dispatch of His Excellency the Governor of Singapore dated the 13th of July, 1951 printed on pages 97 and 98 of the Singapore Riots Enquiry Commission Report.”⁴⁵⁴

The first motion received the unanimous approval of the Council. The second motion was accepted by all without any division. Several lines commending the role of the Volunteer Special Constabulary were added and the words ‘partial breakdown of the Civil Government’ was removed. The third motion was reworded to:

‘That this Council takes note that the Government intends, in view of the serious nature of the comments on the conduct of all senior officers of the Police Force contained in Part XXI of the Singapore Riots Enquiry Commission Report and particularly, to take action to investigate the said comments with a view to taking such disciplinary action, if any, under Colonial Regulations as may be necessary and proper.’

The last motion was rejected by all members of the Council. Gimson was surprised yet pleased that the overall result was in favour of the government. He attributed such affirmative reactions to the Council’s appreciation of the various difficulties faced by the government and its agencies in the days before and during the riots. Members of the Legislative Council were also aware of their shared responsibility in facing up to the difficulties and problems posed by the riots, and they all agreed that the Leach Report was substandard.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁴ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 21st August, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), pp. B194-224.

⁴⁵⁵ “Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 22nd August, 1951”, CO 537/7247.

On the other hand, newspapers in Singapore and Britain reacted negatively to the Legislative Council proceedings. *The Straits Times*, the *Manchester Guardian* and *The Times* editorials described the session as unsatisfactory and 'a sordid victory' on the part of the government for avoiding an explanation for the absence of the Singapore Governor on the first day of the riots. The Leach Report was caricatured as a skilled attempt at concealing the truth of the Maria Hertogh controversy.⁴⁵⁶ Celebrated for its lucid criticisms of the government's policies, the *Singapore Standard* startlingly shared the views of the Chinese press that the government should not be faulted for the riots. The editorials of these newspapers further emphasised that there were many lessons to be learnt from the incident, one of which was the pertinent need for British officials and other elites in the colony to maintain closer rapport with the common people. *Utusan Melayu* stressed the need to improve the living conditions and salaries of the police officers.⁴⁵⁷ In response to several misleading comments by the local press and by newspapers in the United Kingdom, Gimson announced over the radio his assurance that all discussions on the Leach Report had been carried out in a liberal way. He warned the press of partisan and one-sided comments which could threaten democracy in the colony.⁴⁵⁸

British officials and local elites in the Malay Peninsula maintained that the riots had placed the Singapore Governor and the Colonial Secretary in jeopardy. At a tea session with General Harold Briggs (the Director of Operations in Malaya), a British colonial officer based in Penang commented: 'It seems to me

⁴⁵⁶ *The Straits Times*, 22nd August, 1951 and *Antara*, 24th August, 1951.

⁴⁵⁷ 'Singapore Political Report for August, 1951', CO 537/7342.

⁴⁵⁸ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 8, August 1951', CO 537/6800 and 'Singapore Political Report for August, 1951', CO 537/7342.

there are two "very frightened men" in Singapore and they are busy looking for scapegoats.' Briggs' response was swift and telling, 'Well any intelligent person reading the newspapers could only come to that conclusion.'⁴⁵⁹ In the same way, Tan Cheng Lock (President of the Malayan Chinese Association) viewed the Singapore Governor and the Colonial Secretary as lacking in initiative and had proven to be incompetent in the face of an outbreak of mass violence.⁴⁶⁰

The political blunders and poor management of the enquiry had also provoked much displeasure among the higher echelons of the colonial administration. Having been informed that Gimson was rapidly losing the confidence of a large portion of the Singapore community, the Secretary of State for the Colonies maintained that the Singapore Governor should be relieved of his post.⁴⁶¹ Malcolm Macdonald concurred with Griffiths's observation. In fact, he was greatly disturbed by the stream of critiques hurled by local elites at the aloofness and arrogance of British officials in Singapore. A Muslim member of the Legislative Council, for example, commented that such a poor disposition would result in a deterioration of Muslim support towards the British government.⁴⁶² The Commissioner-General found it appalling that, even though the Leach Report had insulated the Singapore government from a complete collapse of legitimacy, Gimson's relationship with the local elites in the colony had still not improved. There was a serious level of distrust for his governorship among 'die-hard European elements' in the colony. To Malcolm Macdonald,

⁴⁵⁹ 'C.D. Whitehead to Tan Cheng Lock, 5th September, 1951', Folio 5, Tan Cheng Lock papers.

⁴⁶⁰ 'Tan Cheng Lock to C.D. Whitehead, 24th January, 1952', Folio 5, Tan Cheng Lock papers.

⁴⁶¹ 'Thomas Lloyd to Malcolm Macdonald, 23rd August, 1951', Malcolm Macdonald Papers, 24/4/28.

⁴⁶² *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 21st August, 1951*, p. B221.

Gimson had 'retained (unwittingly I think) too much of the superiority complex of the old Colonial type of Governor...Over and over again Europeans and Asians alike have expressed to me their regret that, though they liked and admired Gimson a lot, they could never get on to terms of social equality and close personal friendliness with him.'⁴⁶³ There was, at the same time, the problem of Blythe's ineptness in fulfilling the role of Acting Governor should Gimson be retired too soon. It was decided that a formal handover was to take place in March 1952. Johns Fearn Nicoll was proposed as the new governor of Singapore.⁴⁶⁴

The controversies surrounding the Leach Report soon became a topic of debate within the British Cabinet. In his report to the Labour Prime Minister, the British Minister of Defence, Emmanuel Shinwell, observed that the 'standard of personnel on the higher levels in the Administration and Police in Malaya leaves a great deal to be desired and that we must take steps to improve it.' More importantly, the riots were symptomatic of latent inefficiencies in the civil administration than of problems in the uniformed service.⁴⁶⁵ The Secretary of State for the Colonies disagreed with Shinwell's views and defended the Leach Report's findings that the major part of the blame for the riots should be placed upon the police force. The debate between the two officials, according to Anthony Stockwell, ended in a 'draw'.⁴⁶⁶ Upon considering all contending viewpoints,

⁴⁶³ 'Thomas Lloyd to Malcolm Macdonald, 28th August, 1951', Malcolm Macdonald Papers, 22/4/40.

⁴⁶⁴ "Malcolm Macdonald to James Griffiths, 28th August, 1951', Malcolm Macdonald Papers, 24/4/42.

⁴⁶⁵ 'Emmanuel Shinwell to Clement Atlee, 4th September, 1951', FO 371/93117.

⁴⁶⁶ Stockwell, "Imperial Security and Moslem Militancy", p. 332.

Clement Atlee concluded that 'errors had been made but that much had arisen from the initial mistake of placing the Hertogh girl in a Convent.'⁴⁶⁷

On September 1951, a Tribunal Committee was established under Colonial Regulation 68(ii) to deliberate upon punitive actions against six senior police officers. T.A. Brown (a Judge of the Supreme Court), A.W. Frisby (the Director of Education), and Sir Han Hoe Lim (a Member of the Executive Council) were nominated as members of the tribunal whose main task was to read out the charges laid against the officers concerned and to obtain further evidence of their roles during the riots. R.C.B. Wiltshire (former Acting Commissioner of Police), K.L. Johnson (a Senior Police Officer) and W.J. Parks (another Senior Police Officer) were charged with 'gross negligence' in the performance of their duties. Six other sub-charges were laid against Wiltshire, which is revealing of the government's persistent attempt to shift most, if not, all of the blame upon him. In one of the sub-charges, Wiltshire was held responsible for failing 'to give to the Colonial Secretary full and frank reports of the situation.'⁴⁶⁸ Three other officers, N.G Morris (the Deputy Commissioner of Police, CID), W.G. Watson (a Senior Police Officer) and A.H. Frew (another Senior Police Officer) were charged with perjury, manipulation of evidence and attempting to mislead the Commission of Enquiry. To a lesser degree than Wiltshire, yet no better, Morris had three other sub-charges to his name, one of which was the failure 'to make an early search for weapons in the Mosque in North Bridge Road which was known to you to be the

⁴⁶⁷ 'Internal Minutes by Ernest Davies, 10th September, 1951', FO 371/93117.

⁴⁶⁸ 'Wiltshire Enquiry, 25th September, 1951', CO 1022/284. See also, 'Johnson Enquiry, 25th September, 1951', CO 1022/284 and 'Parks Enquiry, 25th September, 1951', CO 1022/284.

focal point of these disturbances'.⁴⁶⁹ The officers were allowed to engage their personal lawyers, yet none accepted this concession. All of the officers cited their inability to pay for the steep legal expenses, but the key underlying reason was a conscious realization that their fates were already sealed and their careers as police officers had come to a close.

Expectedly, Gimson was troubled with the conduct and the eventual outcome of the tribunal's deliberations, especially on whether to allow public access to tribunal sessions or to limit it to governmental circles.⁴⁷⁰ James Griffiths argued that the defendants should be given the prerogative to decide on this point and that all sessions should be filmed.⁴⁷¹ The Singapore Governor contended that a public enquiry would re-ignite the public discontent that was slowly coming to pass. Press coverage of the tribunal could also further weaken the morale of the police force. Gimson thus recommended that the tribunal report be published at a much later date.⁴⁷²

Such suggestions were met with protests from prominent personalities and newspaper editorials which continued their defence of the police officers and agitated for an open and impartial trial.⁴⁷³ *The Straits Budget* highlighted that new evidence on the riots would emerge from the proceedings. It was thus crucial that access to the tribunal report be made public to provide a fuller account of the

⁴⁶⁹ 'Morris Enquiry, 24th September, 1951', CO 1022/284. See also, 'Watson Enquiry, 24th September, 1951', CO 1022/284 and 'Frew Enquiry, 24th September, 1951', CO 1022/284.

⁴⁷⁰ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 21st September, 1951', CO 953/10/3.

⁴⁷¹ 'Oliver Lyttelton to Franklin Gimson, 22nd September, 1951', CO 953/10/3.

⁴⁷² 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 24th September, 1951', CO 953/10/3.

⁴⁷³ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 9th October, 1951', CO 953/10/3.

events in December 1950.⁴⁷⁴ The ex-Director of the Special Branch, Ren  Onraet, criticized the government for absolving the civilian officials of their errors. To him, the Leach Report was written by men who were unacquainted with the danger at hand. The riots would have become even worse if the police had resorted to the use of force on the crowd. Onraet reasoned that the low morale of the police had been over-emphasised in such a way that it risked 'creating something that does not exist'. Moreover, the police force was part of the larger governmental machinery. To focus solely upon the weakness of the police force meant that other deeper problems in the administration of Singapore were conveniently concealed. 'The Commission', Onraet remarked cynically, 'did little to enhance our Civil prestige. It did much to kill it.'⁴⁷⁵ In line with Onraet's critique, Gordon Smith, the Chairman of the Public Services Commission, accused the government and *The Straits Times* of suppressing facts and manufacturing false accounts in order to ward off criticisms launched against them.⁴⁷⁶ Upon witnessing the objections expressed by the press and other civil servants, the Secretary of State for the Colonies decided to allow public access to the proceedings of the tribunal and publishing the report at a later date, subjected to the approval of the new Governor and the new Secretary of State for the Colonies.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁴ *Straits Budget*, 11th October, 1951.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Straits Times*, 1st October, 1951 and *British Malaya*, September, 1951, pp. 330.

⁴⁷⁶ 'Franklin Gimson to James Griffiths, 5th September, 1951', CO 537/7247.

⁴⁷⁷ 'James Griffiths to Franklin Gimson, 17th October, 1951', CO 953/10/3.

• CONCLUSION – SHIFTING FATES, SHATTERED LIVES

The tribunal's investigations ended in November and a report was sent to Whitehall on 11th December 1951.⁴⁷⁸ At the same time, the Singapore Executive Council deliberated on the disciplinary measures to be meted out to the six senior police officers. The Executive Council concurred with the tribunal that there was no strong evidence to prove that Morris, Parks, Frew and Watson had failed to perform their duties or sought to conceal vital information on the circumstances that led to the mishandling of the riots. It was recommended that the four police officers be acquitted of all charges laid against them, and that all legal expenses incurred by Morris be fully refunded. Johnson was to be publicly censured for his poor conduct during the riots. He was to be granted retirement with full pension, and all legal costs incurred by him would be refunded by the government. Likewise, it was proposed that Wiltshire be removed from his post and retired with a full pension.⁴⁷⁹ Living up to its slow-moving and pedantic bureaucratic legacy, the Home government announced that all recommendations would be studied in full and that no firm decisions could be made till several months later.

In the interim, Winston Churchill (the newly elected Conservative Prime Minister), sought the counsel of his advisers in London in regard to the reshuffling of key British officials in Malaya. A lengthy letter was sent by Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery who agitated for the removal of several individuals. Malcolm Macdonald was, to Montgomery, a man 'who talks too much', driven by emotions with no concrete plans. Gimson 'has now "had it", and he admits it'.

⁴⁷⁸ *The Straits Times*, 12th December, 1951.

⁴⁷⁹ 'Franklin Gimson to Oliver Lyttelton, 28th December, 1951', CO 1022/284.

The Singapore Colonial Secretary was unfit for the job as shown by his indecisiveness during the riots. Inferring from his knowledge of Wiltshire via the events that unfolded since the December riots, it was clear to Montgomery that the former Commissioner of Police 'cannot be much good.' In concluding his letter, Montgomery stated that the 'personalities paint a sorry picture in Malaya and Singapore. A complete clean out is wanted.'⁴⁸⁰ Not all of the Field Marshal's recommendations were taken on board by Churchill. Malcolm Macdonald retained his post as the Commissioner-General till 1955.⁴⁸¹ Three months later, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, Oliver Lyttelton, who shared Montgomery's views on an immediate replacement of key officials in Singapore and Malaya, announced Gimson's forthcoming departure as Governor and paid tribute to his contributions. The incoming Governor of Singapore was Johns Fearn Nicoll, and he was to assume office on 1st April, 1952.⁴⁸² Previously appointed as Chief Secretary of Fiji and subsequently Colonial Secretary of Hong Kong, Nicoll had maintained strong links with Indian merchants and businessmen. He was also a popular figure among the Chinese community, due to his friendly disposition and his ability to converse in several Chinese dialects. Upon receiving the news of Nicoll's appointment, the spokesman for the Singapore Overseas Importers and Exporters Association mentioned that 'Singapore has a predominantly Chinese population and it is far better to have a Governor who has lived among the Chinese.'⁴⁸³

⁴⁸⁰ 'Appointment of Templer: Letter from Field Marshal Lord Montgomery to Mr. Churchill. Enclosure: 'Success in Malaya, note by Montgomery, 4th January, 1952', PREM 11/169.

⁴⁸¹ 'Oliver Lyttelton to Clement Atlee, 3rd November, 1953', PREM 11/1306.

⁴⁸² *The Straits Times*, 16th January, 1952.

⁴⁸³ *The Straits Times*, 17th January, 1952. See also, "Government Changes in Federation of Malaya and Singapore", A4231.

By the end of January 1952, the six police officers whose livelihood was now dependent upon the outcome of the tribunal were reported to have expressed their anxiety at the sluggish decision-making process.⁴⁸⁴ Pennefather-Evans articulated his concern to Gimson on the need for the government to issue a public statement that four of the six officers had been found innocent of all charges.⁴⁸⁵ *The Straits Budget* editorial described the delay as 'shameful'.

If the fault lies with the Colonial Office, which appears to have the right to the last word, as usual, then it should realize that its procrastination is bringing the Singapore Government into contempt. If publication is delayed much longer it will be reasonable to suspect that somebody is writing yet another, and still different, verdict.⁴⁸⁶

Psychologically disturbed by events that had transpired since the riots, Wiltshire wrote a long and heartrending letter to Onraet, a former colleague and confidant who stood by him in the worst of times. The former Acting Commissioner of Police recollected how colonial administrators in Singapore and Malaya had perpetually ignored numerous warnings by the police of an impending upheaval which had its roots in the radical elements within Malay society. Yet, when such admonitions proved to be far from mere speculations, the police force ironically became the scapegoat of the system which it sought to protect. Onraet was in full agreement but realised that nothing could reverse Wiltshire's shattered destiny.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ 'Franklin Gimson to Oliver Lyttelton, 23rd January, 1952', CO 1022/284.

⁴⁸⁵ 'Franklin Gimson to Oliver Lyttelton, 25th January, 1952', CO 1022/284.

⁴⁸⁶ *Straits Budget*, 21st February, 1952.

⁴⁸⁷ 'R.C.B Wiltshire to René Onraet, 19th February, 1952', British Association of Malaysia papers. For insights into various attempts by the Special Branch in warning the government of possible threats within the Malay society prior to the riots, see 'Malayan Security Services, Political Intelligence Journals, 1/1948', John Dalley Papers.

In London, Lyttleton went to some length to advise Lionel Leach and members of the Commission of Enquiry to hold back their strong opposition towards the 'undue leniency' of the tribunal.⁴⁸⁸ In the main, British officials in Whitehall approved all recommendations brought forth by the Singapore Executive Council. They went a step further to veto the public censure of Johnson.⁴⁸⁹ Towards the end of March, the tribunal report was published and featured in almost all major newspapers in Singapore and the United Kingdom.⁴⁹⁰ During an exclusive interview at his residence in England, Wiltshire declared that his career in the Colonial Service was over and he 'will get down to the work of growing cabbages.'⁴⁹¹ Nine years later, he was re-appointed as the Commissioner of Police in Aden.⁴⁹² Two Singapore Legislative Councillors, Lim Yew Hock and Charles Joseph Paglar, expressed their grievances concerning the government's victimization of Wiltshire. The *Singapore Standard* and *Utusan Melayu* editorials wrote that 'the grounds used for the retirement of Mr Wiltshire could very well be applied to many other officers in the colony' and urged that the Singapore Colonial Secretary be subjected to further inquiry.⁴⁹³ Such resistance from the press and prominent personalities in Singapore and England dimmed towards the second half of the year.

To a great extent, the strategy of self-criticism which the British employed proved to be successful in ensuring that the higher echelons of the colonial state

⁴⁸⁸ 'Oliver Lyttelton to Franklin Gimson, 14th March, 1952', CO 1022/284.

⁴⁸⁹ 'Official Letter from Secretary of State for the Colonies to Sir A. Lionel Leach, 15th March, 1952', CO 1022/284.

⁴⁹⁰ 'Singapore Political Report for March, 1952', CO 1022/206. See also, *The Report of the Police Disciplinary Inquiries 1951*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952).

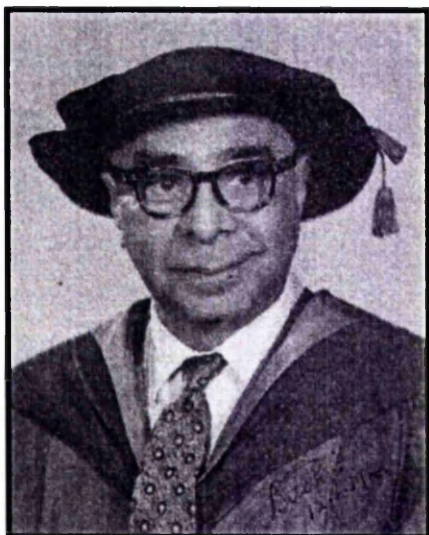
⁴⁹¹ *Singapore Standard*, 27th March, 1952.

⁴⁹² See Anthony Stockwell (ed.), *Malaya* Vol. 2 (London: HMSO, 1995), p. 359, note 6.

⁴⁹³ *Singapore Standard*, 27th March, 1952 and *Utusan Melayu*, 27th March, 1952.

were insulated from a severe collapse of legitimacy in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. The Singapore Governor was left generally unscathed throughout the ordeal. Towards the end of 1953, the Singapore Colonial Secretary retired honourably from the Malayan Civil Service, and went on to become a renowned writer of books about Chinese labour and secret societies in Malaya.⁴⁹⁴ This was in stark contrast to the fates of lower-ranking colonial officials, such as Wiltshire and Johnson, as well as the Malay policemen who were made to shoulder much of the blame for the riots. Although it has to be admitted that the British were self-critical and generally receptive of criticisms launched against them, this distinctive feature that characterized the Empire must be seen in the light of actual practices that were determined by the realities of the day. Indeed, self-criticism in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots was no less than a complex process of restoring the essential integrity and, more importantly, legitimacy of the high command of the colonial administration.

⁴⁹⁴ See Wilfred Blythe, *Historical Sketch of Chinese Labour in Malaya* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1953) and Wilfred Blythe, *The Impact of Chinese Secret Societies in Malaya: A Historical Study* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).



Bashir Mallal and Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui
Source: Mansoor Adabi Papers and Syed Ali Alsagoff



Syed Ibrahim bin Omar Alsagoff
Source: Syed Ali Alsagoff



Standing on the extreme left: Ahmad Ibrahim at a tea reception organized by members of the Indian community. On the far right is Mansoor Adabi
Source: Mansoor Adabi Papers



Members of the Inter-Religious Organisation
Seated fourth from left is Malcolm Macdonald
Source: Syed Ali Alsagoff

CHAPTER 6

Reconciliation

In the foregoing chapters, I have elucidated on the strategies of proscriptions, surveillance and self-criticism which led to the detection, arrests and censure of persons and institutions held responsible for the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots. Yet, to fully comprehend the dynamics and intricacies of British colonialism in post-war Singapore, particularly in the event of mass violence, one must not fail to fathom the interplay and manipulation of strategies that sought to discipline as well as to reconcile differences with the colonized subjects.⁴⁹⁵ The waning of British primacy in an era of decolonization meant that the eradication of threats posed by 'extremists' had to be counteracted by the maintenance of relationships of close collaboration with the 'moderates' within the colonized societies. Pointedly, Frank Heinlein observes that the global environment of the post-World War Two period posed an array of serious challenges to the relevance of the British Empire. The employment of brute force alone in the management of colonies was no longer viable 'at least if Britain wanted to retain the support of its allies.'⁴⁹⁶ In view of this, the next two chapters of this thesis will examine British strategies of reconciliation and reforms which were an integral part of the effort to regain their tarnished image and agency.

⁴⁹⁵ For a discussion of the British use of such strategies in the management of its colonies in the Victorian period, see Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Paradox of American Power* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 16 and p. 144.

⁴⁹⁶ Frank Heinlein, *British Government Policy and Decolonisation, 1945-1963: Scrutinising the Official Mind* (London: Frank Cass, 2002), p. 107. See also: Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya*, p. 308.

‘Reconciliation’, which was conceivably a more arduous and convoluted undertaking, is the main subject of this chapter.

I argue that the British colonial administration in Singapore and the Colonial Office in Britain were faced with a daunting challenge of reconciling the interests of multiple parties in the local and international arenas. Three interconnected approaches were employed to diffuse the tense atmosphere. First, the policy of repression was counterbalanced with the facade that the British were not by any means insensitive towards Islam and the immediate concerns of Muslims in Singapore. Secondly, the British sought to re-establish cordial relations with politicians and administrators in the Netherlands, yet at the same time, allay the established perception among Muslims that the British were pro-Dutch. Thirdly, intensive measures were undertaken to regain the confidence of the European, Eurasian and other communities in Singapore who had been traumatized by the spectre of violence and the ineffectiveness of the police force. Indeed, a great number of people from various beliefs, ethnicities and classes in the colony were plagued by grief and suffering resulting from the loss of human life as well as financial losses incurred due to damaged and stolen property.

In other words, the British were confronted with the difficult and precarious task of ensuring that no individual, group or institution implicated in the Maria Hertogh controversy was given preferential treatment over others. To balance and rule, more than to divide and rule, was the British approach to the politics of regaining their tarnished image and agency in the aftermath of the riots. It is important to point out that, although the colonial state played a key role in the

complex and intensive process of reconciliation, it did not possess a sole monopoly of initiative. Accordingly, in this chapter, I will expound on how various individuals and organisations from within the colonized society actively contributed to the efforts of mending inter-racial and inter-religious relations that had been severely shaken by the riots and providing relief to those who had suffered throughout the ordeal.

• RESTORING PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

One of the earliest attempts by Singapore Colonial Secretary to be reconciled with the distressed members of the public was to make it known that law and order had been reinstated two days after the outbreak of violence. During a radio broadcast, Wilfred Blythe announced that government offices would resume their daily operations and that 'this example will be followed by all in Singapore.' Put simply, life would return to normal.⁴⁹⁷ The Singapore public was also furnished with emergency procedures that had been established since the quelling of the riots. A coordinated communication network between the Public Relations Office, the Executive Council and the police force had been instituted to ensure a swift deployment of military and police officers in the face of all forms of widespread disturbances.⁴⁹⁸ At about the same time, extensive publicity was given to a diplomatic visit by two American Senators. Theodore F. Green and Homer Ferguson were reported to have walked along North Bridge Road - a site where Europeans had been attacked - without police escorts. When interviewed by

⁴⁹⁷ *The Straits Times*, 14th December, 1950.

⁴⁹⁸ *The Straits Times*, 20th December, 1950 and 29th December, 1950. See also 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797 and 'Appendix to Brief of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Meeting with the Prime Minister on Monday the 10th September, 1951', CO 537/7247.

a reporter from the *Straits Times*, the Senators remarked that they 'were impressed by the signs of Singapore's prosperity.'⁴⁹⁹

Such shallow propaganda met with a mixed response from newspaper editorials in Singapore and England. As the unofficial voice of the UMNO party in Malaya, the *Majlis* newspaper expressed its skepticism towards the Singapore Colonial Secretary's optimistic forecast. The editorial remarked in a satirical way that, '*Belanda makan nangka, British dapat getah*' which implied that although the Dutch had been the instigators, it was the British who were left to shoulder the long-term consequences of the riots.⁵⁰⁰ The editorial highlighted the fact that a large number of shops in the riot-stricken areas were still closed, and attendance at work had dropped substantially as many workers were apparently injured or arrested, or refused to leave their homes in fear of their lives. Such fear was compounded by a growing animosity towards Muslims, who were perceived as the main culprits behind the riots.⁵⁰¹ In parallel with this, the *Manchester Guardian* highlighted the possibility of a major outbreak of violence between Malays and Chinese in Singapore. It was claimed that the riots were rooted in the entrenched bitterness of Malays towards the political and economic dominance of the British and the Chinese in the colony. Race and class differences rather than religion were the driving forces behind the riots and many skirmishes to come.⁵⁰² These politically-charged comments were widely publicized in the pages of the *Singapore Standard*. Interestingly, the *Utusan Melayu* denounced what it deemed as the erroneous and shallow analyses of the *Manchester Guardian*. The Malay

⁴⁹⁹ *The Straits Times*, 16th December, 1950.

⁵⁰⁰ A similar English idiom would be that the British had gotten 'the short end of the stick.'

⁵⁰¹ *Majlis*, 15th December, 1950.

⁵⁰² *The Singapore Standard*, 14th December, 1950.

daily maintained that most Malays in Singapore regarded the Chinese as their co-citizens, and that there had never been a deliberate campaign to uproot the Chinese from Malaya.⁵⁰³

Reacting to the seemingly negative portrayals by the press of developments in Singapore, representatives from various states and organisations in mainland Malaya published their appeals for Muslims to remain calm. They expressed the hope that non-violence and the ideology of peace would be upheld by all parties.⁵⁰⁴ Under the chairmanship of Dato Onn bin Jaafar, Muslim elites in Singapore in turn encouraged their co-religionists to work towards mending inter-religious ties that had been severely disrupted by the riots. Among those who signed a public statement that was published in all major newspapers in the colony were Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, Tuan Haji Ali bin Haji Salleh (the Chief Kathi of Singapore) and M. J. Namazie.⁵⁰⁵ The Singapore Colonial Secretary too issued a public statement which stressed the importance of the media in the reconciliation process. Editors of newspapers were prompted to seriously 'reflect upon the incidents of the last few weeks, for there is a lesson to be learned here too - the lesson that if we are to maintain that harmony for which Singapore has, since its foundation, been famed, care must be taken in the presentation of news not to offend religious susceptibilities and exacerbate communal differences.'⁵⁰⁶

Blythe's tactic of what has been termed 'blame displacement'⁵⁰⁷ for the outbreak of riots was not left unchallenged. *The Straits Budget* countered the

⁵⁰³ *Utusan Melayu*, 19th December, 1950.

⁵⁰⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 14th December, 1950.

⁵⁰⁵ *The Straits Times*, 15th December, 1950.

⁵⁰⁶ *The Singapore Free Press*, 20th December, 1950.

⁵⁰⁷ Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, pp. 305-327.

Singapore Colonial Secretary's remarks by publishing several opinion pieces which portrayed the British as the chief culprits behind the tensions that had developed. A European commented that although the British colonial administration in Singapore professed their profound respect for the religion of Islam, events that had unfolded in the months prior to the riots revealed that the government had failed to live up to its own rhetoric. The outbreak of mass violence was a product of British insensitivity and indifference to the demands of Muslims.⁵⁰⁸ *The Straits Times*, the *Singapore Free Press* and the *Singapore Standard* reasoned that the blame placed upon the press was based on hindsight rather than foresight. No governmental agency had made attempts to play down what was alleged to be sensational press coverage of the Maria Hertogh legal case. Reflecting on the debate that ensued, John Leslie Micheal Gorrie (the Private Secretary to the Singapore Governor) espoused the view that the British government should have shouldered much of the blame for the riots. The newly established Civil Service was unacquainted with the socio-religious challenges and anxieties faced by the Muslim minority community in the immediate post-war years. This was made worse by the outright mishandling of various issues that were deemed sacred to Muslims. The government rather than the press per se, according to Gorrie, was responsible for the attacks launched against Europeans during the riots.⁵⁰⁹ Such observations lent credence to the assertions made by Dato Onn a month prior to the outbreak of riots. To the President of UMNO, Malaya has been made 'a dumping ground' for British officials of inferior quality.⁵¹⁰

⁵⁰⁸ *The Straits Budget*, 21st December, 1950.

⁵⁰⁹ "Recorded interview with Mr. John Leslie Micheal Gorrie, 8th October, 1991", *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A0001309).

⁵¹⁰ "Dato Onn to James Griffiths, 1st November, 1950", CO 537/6020.

Standing in between these opposing viewpoints, William Langdon, the American Consul-General who was based in Singapore during the same period, observed that the press had exacerbated racial and religious antagonisms which, in part, precipitated the riots. English and vernacular language newspapers in Singapore were sold out in the weeks prior to the riots, due to the extensive and lurid coverage of the Maria Hertogh legal case. On several days, even the updates on the Korean War were pushed from the front pages by the news of the case.⁵¹¹ Nevertheless, the newspapers had 'acquitted themselves well after the outbreak of the rioting with good news coverage of the event and restrained criticism of the authorities. They must have realized, but they would not think of admitting it; that they unwittingly contributed to the outbreak of violence; they subsequently cooperated in every way, however, to dissuade rioters from further violence.'⁵¹²

The Chinese community in Singapore also played an important role in promoting dialogue, assuaging tensions and assisting the British in the maintenance of public order. The largest Chinese daily newspaper, the *Nanyang Siang Pao*, urged the British to 'think thrice' before committing to a legal decision in the upcoming appeal trial. The move to restore Maria Hertogh to her foster mother and husband would be of no great loss to the Dutch. On the other hand, the Malays were an important and integral part of the British Empire. The British should therefore ensure the repatriation of Maria Hertogh back to Singapore to avoid the violation of the religious rights of the Muslims, which could pave the way for further bloodshed and violence. The Guomindang newspaper, *Sin Chew*

⁵¹¹ 'William R. Langdon to Department of State, 15th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-1550, NACPM.

⁵¹² 'Press Comments on the Hertogh Case and Singapore Riots', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2750, NACPM.

Jit Poh, called upon the British, the Dutch and the Muslims to allow Maria Hertogh to decide for herself on whether to reside in the Netherlands or Malaya. The paper stressed that Netherlands' diplomatic relations with other Muslim countries, such as Indonesia and Pakistan, would most certainly be jeopardized if the custody of Maria Hertogh was awarded to her natural parents.⁵¹³ Another observer who identified himself as a 'Straits Chinese' expressed his regrets that the 'very good name of the Singapore Malays and Muslims, who are regarded as a most law abiding community in the colony has been besmirched.'⁵¹⁴ In tandem with these commentaries, several well-known Chinese personalities exerted their influence over the community by discouraging youths in the villages from committing acts of violence.⁵¹⁵

Admittedly, such a proactive move by Chinese elites in the colony was not entirely motivated by altruism. It was, in some measure, a latent strategy to regain the trust of the British which had been blemished by the growing assumption that most Chinese supported the communists. The Chinese in Singapore were said to be filled with hope and optimism upon the quelling of the riots. Although they were sympathetic towards the Europeans and Eurasians who were injured and murdered by rioters, Chinese elites were glad that the British had begun to realize the flaws embedded within their pro-Malay policy. They hoped that friendship and trust would swing back in their favour.⁵¹⁶ Beyond the public show of support, the

⁵¹³ "Press Comments on the Hertogh Case and Singapore Riots", RG 59, 746F.00/12-2750, NACPM.

⁵¹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 17th December, 1950.

⁵¹⁵ 'Transcription of Interview with Mr. R.H. Barth, 10th February, 1984', *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000392), p. 216 and *Singapore Standard*, 13th December, 1950.

⁵¹⁶ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797 and 'Political Summary-1st December 1950 to 31st January 1951 Part III – Colonial Territories – Singapore', CO 537/7346.

prevailing view among the Anglophone Chinese was that the riots 'served them (the British) bloody well right.'⁵¹⁷ Rumours with regards to Malcolm Macdonald's ineffectiveness during the riots were also circulating like wild fire within Chinese circles. The Commissioner-General was alleged to have been at an antique shop with Harold Stassen (the President of the University of Pennsylvania) during the riots. They were heavily guarded by several police officers and troops who could have been deployed elsewhere.⁵¹⁸

Despite the appeals of community leaders, hatred, hostility and distrust remained deep-seated and virulent. Muslims in Singapore were committed to the perception that the British would not cease to deny their religious rights.⁵¹⁹ Those of a radical bent were prepared for another violent confrontation in the event of any sign of Western prejudice towards Islam and Muslims. In the same way, Europeans and Eurasians expressed their lack of confidence in the colonial state's ability to ease the tense situation. On 17th December, an anonymous writer who signed off as 'A European' wrote a polemical commentary against the police for its failure to protect the people during the riots. 'It is indeed news to learn that the police are issued with firearms only to save their own lives. Surely their primary purpose is to protect the public whom they serve and to quell riots and other dangerous threats to public security? Is it not for this purpose that they are issued with weapons?' On the same day, a satirical cartoon portrayed a man pointing his

⁵¹⁷ 'William R. Langdon (American Consul General in Singapore) to Department of State, 20th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2050, NACPM.

⁵¹⁸ 'William R. Langdon (American Consul General in Singapore) to Department of State, 20th December, 1950', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2050, NACPM. For details on the formal arrangements for Harold Stassen's visit to Malaya, see: 'Malcolm Macdonald to Foreign Office, 27th November, 1950', FO 371/81747.

⁵¹⁹ 'Extract from PMR No. 12/1950 dated 27/12/1950', CO 537/7302. See also 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 2, January 1951', CO 537/6797.

fist at a British judge with the caption, 'Thank God for the Army, but what we want to know is why they were called in so late!'⁵²⁰ Such alarmist and negative reactions were unsurprising, as the two communities were the main victims of the riots. The Europeans were particularly petrified by their unprecedented experience of being the primary targets of mass aggression.⁵²¹ Indeed, women and children from the largely expatriate community were haunted by vivid recollections of assaults upon their families and friends. A former British colonial official in Singapore recounted that it 'was a nasty time for all of us'. Recalling his ambivalence towards a Malay driver at the time of the riots, Lionel Griffith-Jones wrote: 'We could neither be sure whether his Muslim presence with me would make it safer for me, or my Christian presence with him makes things uncomfortable for him.'⁵²²

Unbeknown to the general public, government officials had organized several meetings with Europeans and Eurasians to address their anxieties and to provide updates on the security measures that had been taken to protect them. In one of the meetings, a suggestion was made that Europeans and Eurasians residing in areas where fatal attacks had taken place should be provided with revolvers for self-defense. But the idea was shelved, as it proved to be problematic at a practical level. Rudy Mosbergen, who played an active role in airing his views during the meetings, posited that it 'could well be that the idea was dropped because of all kinds of problems that would emerge from such an arrangement.'⁵²³ It was feared

⁵²⁰ *The Straits Times*, 17th December, 1950.

⁵²¹ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1950*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 1.

⁵²² Griffith-Jones, *That's My Lot*, p. 138.

⁵²³ "Transcription of Interview with Mr. Rudy Mosbergen, 26th April, 1994", *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000510), pp. 113-115.

that the carrying of firearms would precipitate unintended conflict and violence. Moreover, the Eurasians were mindful that Henry L. Velge, the Volunteer Special Constable who fired the first shots during the riots which injured two Malays, was a well-respected member of the Eurasian community. Hence, one of the safe courses adopted by Europeans and Eurasians in the aftermath of the riots was to stay indoors. They were also advised by the police to refrain from visiting areas where their safety would likely be compromised. Although an exception to the rule, several Eurasian families migrated to Europe and Australia in order to remain safe from Muslim aggression.⁵²⁴ A similar policy was adopted by some American expatriates in Singapore who, as a precautionary measure, had sent their wives and children back to the United States.⁵²⁵

Meanwhile, members of the Muslim Advisory Board stepped up their campaign to restore Maria Hertogh to her husband and to agitate for the release of detainees who had not participated in the riots. A dialogue session between prominent Muslims such as Dato Onn bin Jaafar, M.J. Namazie, Haji Ali, Syed Ahmed Alsagoff, Sardon Jubir, Nazir Mallal, Fadlullah Suhaimi, Haji Abu Bakar and Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui and the Singapore Governor was held, at which, three pertinent demands were put forward. First, the Muslim leaders sought an assurance from the British that the Dutch would be informed of the appointment of a Muslim who was tasked by the Muslim Advisory Board to ascertain 'the wishes of the said Nadra binte Ma'aroof (Maria Hertogh) as to whether she desires to remain in Holland or to be returned to Singapore'. The second demand pertained to Maria Hertogh's return to Singapore during the

⁵²⁴ "Recorded interview with Mr. Joseph Henry Chopard, 1st August, 1985", *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000561).

⁵²⁵ *Antara*, 11th January, 1951.

appeal court hearing. The Muslim deputation hoped that the British would ensure the full cooperation of the Dutch in that aspect.⁵²⁶ Finally, a request was made that those in police custody be treated in a just way, so as to avoid unnecessary afflictions upon the innocent. Sardon Jubir highlighted the need for relief grants to the dependents of those who had been arrested during the riots.⁵²⁷ In response, Gimson stressed that the British Government viewed the Maria Hertogh case purely from a judicial angle and that all decisions would be left to the court's discretion. The Singapore Governor added that the British would maintain the fullest respect for the religion of Islam and would safeguard the religious liberties of Muslims. He went on to assure them that the first and second demands would be brought to the attention of the Home Government. As for the third demand, Gimson gave his word that the Social Welfare Department would commit its resources towards alleviating all forms of difficulties faced by the families of those injured and the many others who had been arrested. The Governor added that the screening of detainees would be hastened to weed out innocent persons. The meeting went on to discuss various measures to promote the welfare of the Muslim community and the protection of Islamic customs in such emotionally intense times.⁵²⁸ Acting upon the advice of the Colonial Office, the Governor later acceded to the first demand and said that the government would assist to the fullest extent in obtaining the cooperation of the Dutch authorities in repatriating Maria Hertogh to be present for the appeal.⁵²⁹ At a personal level, however, Gimson was apparently shaken by the meeting as it reflected the heightened

⁵²⁶ 'Franklin Gimson to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17th December, 1950', FO 371/93114.

⁵²⁷ See 'Public Relations – Report', FO 371/93116 and 'Open letter to His Excellency Sir Franklin Charles Gimson', FO 371/93116.

⁵²⁸ 'Franklin Gimson to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 17th December, 1950', FO 371/93114.

⁵²⁹ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 18th December, 1950', FO 371/93114.

activism and assertiveness of the Muslim elites. He was certain that the failure to respond effectively to Muslim demands would further inflame animosities locally and in other parts of the Muslim world.⁵³⁰

Correspondingly, the Singapore Colonial Secretary issued another press release which stated that forty-five armed vehicles, fifteen armoured cars and 600 soldiers and policemen had been deployed throughout Singapore. Blythe reported that crowds were seen cheering as the troops passed by their residences. This was a clear testimony that a majority of the citizens of Singapore respected the laws of the colony and were sanguine that the military would protect their lives and property. The Singapore Colonial Secretary also paid tribute to the Volunteer Special Constables for their commitment and vigilance in aiding the regular policemen.⁵³¹

In London, colonial officials sought the cooperation of Dutch politicians in the Netherlands to mitigate excessive press coverage on Maria Hertogh's arrival at the airport. Muslims in Singapore were attuned to developments in the Netherlands and would react violently to the jubilant celebrations which had been planned by Catholic activists. Writing to the Colonial Office, Philip Nichols (British Ambassador at The Hague) reported that a strict warning had been issued to all Dutch newspapers to avoid sensationalism and misreporting. Dozens of Christian organisations and parties were also advised to practise moderation in cheering for the Hertoghs upon their arrival at the Schiphol airport. Though the Dutch authorities were unsuccessful in preventing the cheers of large crowds at

⁵³⁰ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 18th December, 1950', FO 371/93114.

⁵³¹ *The Singapore Free Press*, 19th December, 1950.

the airport, preemptive measures prevailed on other occasions. At Bergen-op-Zoom, where the Hertoghs resided, no extensive celebrations were observed. Newspapers in the country covered the story in great detail, yet none highlighted the political and religious aspects rooted within the legal case 'except to say that the riots were significant of the present tension between the East and the West. Comment in the responsible newspapers were on the lines that unhealthy interest was being shown in this little girl and that the sooner the whole story was forgotten the better it would be for all concerned. In short, I think the Government has not done badly, though for some reason or other something seems to have gone wrong at Schipol itself.'⁵³²

• PACIFYING THE MUSLIMS

Earlier on, mention has been made about the Southeast Asia Muslim Missionary Conference which was held towards the closing of the year. Whilst the British intelligence services were concerned with attempts by Muslim leaders to harvest support for the Maria Hertogh case, for Malcolm Macdonald, the event provided an excellent opportunity to repair the damaged ties with influential Muslim leaders in Southeast Asia. Although Malcolm Macdonald was unable to deliver the inaugural address at the Conference, he ensured that a carefully-crafted speech was sent to the organizers to be read on his behalf.⁵³³ *Jamiyah* was commended for taking the lead in strengthening the religious commitment of Muslims in Southeast Asia in the midst of an unending battle against secular ideologies which promoted violence. Furthermore, Malcolm Macdonald called for

⁵³² Philip Nichols to J.D. Murray, 19th December, 1950', FO 371/84677.

⁵³³ Ahmad and Wanjor, *Report of the Southeast Asia Muslim Missionary Conference*, p. 7.

close cooperation between representatives from different territories to bring about a climate of religious freedom and mutual tolerance.⁵³⁴

The Commissioner-General's critical role in the promotion of religious dialogue and understanding did not end there. On his own initiative, he called for a meeting with members of Inter-Religious Organisation (I.R.O). Formed only a year prior to the riots, the I.R.O. was a brainchild of Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, whose main intent was to establish a religious front against the corrupting influence of communism in Singapore and Malaya. The I.R.O pursued three inter-related objectives. First, the organisation hoped to foster friendship and goodwill between leaders and representatives of major world religions. Secondly, it aimed at promoting a spirit of mutual tolerance, understanding and appreciation of different faiths. Thirdly, the I.R.O hoped to foster close cooperation among its members for the common good of the community. To achieve these objectives, informal activities, regular discussions and annual conferences were organized to fortify a common set of values between its members and the general public.⁵³⁵ As the patron of I.R.O., Malcolm Macdonald was instrumental in garnering mass support for the organisation from its inception. A major setback encountered was the failure to obtain the participation of Roman Catholics, who were instructed 'by orders from higher authority outside Malaya' to play no part in the activities of the organisation.⁵³⁶ They were, however, provided with updates of the I.R.O.'s resolutions and activities.

⁵³⁴ *The Singapore Free Press*, 26th December, 1950 and *The Straits Times*, 20th December, 1950.

⁵³⁵ 'Inter-Religious Organisation (Singapore and Johore Bahru)', PRO 23.

⁵³⁶ 'Malcolm Macdonald to James Griffiths, 14th January, 1951', CO 537/7302.

Three weeks after the outbreak of the riots, Malcolm Macdonald called for an informal tea session with the executive members of the I.R.O. Distrust and disappointment was manifested by those present. The Christians, for that matter, were embittered by the lack of compassion shown by Muslim leaders towards Christian members of the I.R.O. who had been attacked by rioters. One of the worst casualties was a Presbyterian Minister, Robert Greer, who had been beaten nearly to death. Muslim members of the I.R.O explained that they were unable to reach out to the non-Muslim victims of the riots because they were preoccupied with the urgent task of dissuading their co-religionists from engaging in violent acts. As the tea session proceeded, Malcolm Macdonald mooted the idea of issuing a public statement on the maintenance of religious harmony in Singapore. Several members expressed their reservations, but a consensus was reached in that the declaration would be 'simple, sincere and in its way noble statement of the unity upon this issue of the leaders of all the religions represented in Singapore and Johore. As such, it will have a certain amount of influence on large numbers of local followers of all the faiths.'⁵³⁷ The statement was subsequently publicized by the media, which described it as a notable effort by religious leaders in the colony to reach out to those who were directly or indirectly affected by the riots.⁵³⁸ Soon after, visits to hospitals were organized and necessary aid was provided to numerous persons who had been injured during the riots. It was indeed a crucial juncture in the history of the organisation, as it rose to greater prominence in the midst of the reconciliation process.⁵³⁹ Although Catholics maintained a guarded

⁵³⁷ 'Malcolm Macdonald to James Griffiths, 14th January, 1951', CO 537/7302.

⁵³⁸ *Utusan Melayu*, 12th January, 1951 and *The Straits Times*, 12th January, 1951. See also 'Statement by George G. Thompson, Public Relations Secretary (Singapore), 22nd February, 1951', CO 953/10/1. See Appendix 1 of this thesis for the Full Statement.

⁵³⁹ "Recorded interview with Mr. Mehervan Singh, 23rd July, 1985", *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000553).

distance from the organisation, the I.R.O. played a major role in bridging religious boundaries and dispelling misconceptions, both in Singapore and in Malaya, up to the advent of the Labour Front government in 1955.⁵⁴⁰

Towards the end of January 1951, the Muslim Advisory Board conducted goodwill sessions in rural areas of Singapore with the object of dispelling rumours, providing the true facts of the Maria Hertogh case, and admonishing the Muslims to maintain cordial relations with non-Muslims.⁵⁴¹ Although most Muslims were progressively pacified by such initiatives, remnants of dissatisfaction within the community prevailed. A case in point was the demand for places of religious instruction by Malay firemen of the Geylang Fire Station. Even though the fire station was located adjacent to a mosque, the firemen reasoned that no classes could be conducted therein as the mosque was built solely for the purposes of prayer and worship. The British saw the issue as one that could potentially re-ignite Muslim discontent towards the colonial state. Of particular concern was the fact that acquiescing to Muslim demands would set a precedent for civil servants of other religious faiths to agitate for similar facilities. The Singapore Municipal Commission was tasked to conduct extensive investigations, and discussions were held with the firemen. After a long-drawn debate, the request was rejected.⁵⁴²

⁵⁴⁰ 'Public Relations Officer to the Governor, Singapore', 16th November, 1955, PRO 19.

⁵⁴¹ 'Extract of Minutes of 21st Meeting held on 12th January 1951, at Kuala Lumpur by Joint Information and Propaganda Committee', CO 537/7302.

⁵⁴² "Minutes of Meeting of Estates and Fire Brigade Committee held on Tuesday, 19th December, 1950 (I-92/50)", in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the City Council of Singapore, 1950* (Singapore: The Council, 1951); *The Singapore Free Press*, 2nd January, 1951 and *Melayu Raya*, 3rd January, 1951.

Subsequently, Muslim writers and newspaper editorials launched a stream of polemics against the British and their collaborators. Chief among these was Ahmad Lutfi (whose real name was Syed Abdullah bin Abdul Hamid Al-Edrus). Born in 1911 to a rich Hadrami family based at Banjarmasin in modern day Indonesia, Ahmad Lutfi gained fame through publishing and writing novels, children's fiction, language textbooks and political commentaries. His popularity peaked towards the end of December 1950, upon the publication of a fictional depiction of the Maria Hertogh controversy. The book emerged as a best seller throughout Malaya.⁵⁴³ In one of his political commentaries published in the January 1951 issue of the *Qalam* magazine, Ahmad Lutfi highlighted that Muslims were ready to sacrifice their lives in the event of any encroachment upon Islamic laws. He urged the British to display more respect towards Islamic beliefs and legal injunctions, especially in the realm of personal laws. This would prevent a recurrence of religious riots in Singapore.⁵⁴⁴ Ahmad Lutfi's critique of the British was accentuated by coverage given by the *Melayu Raya* newspaper to the difficulties faced by the wives of six Muslim leaders who were still under detention. Bereft of financial support from their husbands, the women were said to be suffering from mental depression. The *Melayu Raya* editorials went on to chide Muslim elites in Singapore for their negligence towards the Muslims who had suffered during the riots. Thus far, only Mansoor Adabi, Bashir Mallal and Sardon Jubir had paid visits and provided necessary aid to the families of those who had been detained. Another personality who was eulogized for her philanthropic efforts was Che Zaharah, whom along with the members of the Singapore Malay

⁵⁴³ Ahmad Lutfi, *Anak Angkat* (Singapura: Qalam Press, 1950). See also, Talib Samat, *Ahmad Lutfi: Penulis, Penerbit dan Pendakwah* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 2002), pp. 87-89.

⁵⁴⁴ *Qalam*, Bilangan 6, January 1951.

Women's Welfare Association, had distributed food and other basic necessities to twenty families.⁵⁴⁵

The response from Muslim leaders towards *Melayu Raya*'s accusations was swift. On 8th January, Sardon Jubir exhorted members of the public to inform him of specific incidences of wrongful abuse by the police during the riots and in their aftermath. Simultaneously, the Singapore Malay Union established the 'Muslim Welfare Committee' whose primary task was to assist Muslim and non-Muslim families who were in dire straits. A voluntary contribution of \$1,173 was collected from sympathizers and donors within and outside of Singapore. The committee also distributed \$20 worth of aid each to more than 70 families, most of whom were Malays, Indian Muslims and Eurasians. The number of families in crisis as a result of the riots rose rapidly to 145 some few months later. To further alleviate the extent of suffering experienced by Muslims, the Singapore Muslim League distributed bags of rice and packets of meat to the families of detainees. Another relief committee which was presided over by Syed Abdullah bin Yahya informed the press that \$200 had been raised and that only thirty-seven pieces of clothing had been distributed. An appeal was made for members of the public to contribute generously to its cause. In unison with this, the Muslim Advisory Board stepped up its visits to the homes of crisis-stricken families.⁵⁴⁶

As expected, the Singapore Governor built upon the efforts to pacify Muslims in Singapore and, at his own discretion, reiterated the benevolent nature

⁵⁴⁵ *Melayu Raya*, 3rd - 6th January, 1951.

⁵⁴⁶ *The Straits Times*, 13th - 22nd January, 1951; *Melayu Raya*, 8th January, 1951; 'Minutes of Singapore Muslim League Committee Meeting, 20th June, 1951', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers and 'Mohd Salleh (Secretary of Kesatuan Melayu Singapura) to Bashir Mallal, 31st December, 1950', Mansoor Adabi Private Papers.

of Britain's rule of the colony. During a tea party at the Raffles Hotel attended by representatives of religious faiths, Gimson spoke about the impartiality and independence of British courts. He stressed that the maintenance of law and order was of 'prime importance to all those who wish to worship in a country of more than one religion.' Members of all religions should work hand in hand with the government to prevent disorder and chaos. 'Muslim subjects of the King', said the Governor, 'have always held a high place in His Majesty's regard and have always been considered as among his most loyal supporters. The Muslim community in Singapore has, therefore, a high reputation to maintain and I hope that they will do nothing to besmirch this reputation and so to bring themselves and their religion into disrepute.'⁵⁴⁷ At this juncture, it is worthwhile to restate that Gimson's discourse on governmental non-interference in legislative processes in Singapore was far from truthful. As seen in Chapter Four, the Singapore Governor had taken the proactive move to conduct secret negotiations with the aim of inducing Mansoor Adabi to dissolve his marriage with Maria Hertogh in accordance with the laws of Islam. Several well-respected Muslims had also come in support of the British but all in vain.⁵⁴⁸ Mansoor Adabi was more than convinced in pursuing his appeal at the Singapore High Court.

Efforts at reconciliation were also directed towards compensating those who had sustained injuries or had lost property during the riots. An announcement was made pertaining to the disbursement of claims to be considered on an ex-gratia basis. 'Compensation will be met for injury (including fatal injury), damage, thefts or destruction of property in the riots. No compensation will be

⁵⁴⁷ *Utusan Melayu*, 13th January, 1951 and *The Straits Times*, 13th January, 1951.

⁵⁴⁸ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 1st February, 1951', FO 371/93116.

paid to anyone who was a party or accessory to the riots. Claims should be sent to the Colonial Secretary's Office before February 28.⁵⁴⁹ Expressions of both sarcasm and praise from various community leaders in the colony ensued upon governmental declaration of committing itself to a compensation scheme. Nazir Mallal told *The Straits Times* that the scheme did not come as a surprise to many, given that the British has already revealed their plans to implement it at an earlier date. Thio Chan Bee, a nominated member of the Legislative Council, remarked that '[u]sually Government machinery works slowly, but in this instance it has worked fast.'⁵⁵⁰ There was however the problem of determining the appropriate amount of compensation to be disbursed. A segment within the Singapore populace argued that they should be compensated for 'pain' and 'suffering'. There were others who contended that inflationary rates should be factored into the compensation scheme, as the price of cars has risen rapidly since the riots. To address such ambiguities, a tribunal was established to consider all cases. In the meantime, the Social Welfare Department obtained updates and rendered financial assistance to more than 140 riot victims. The Singapore Municipal Commission followed suit by paying for the damages to property incurred by civil servants. One of the cases that had been brought to light was that of a European officer whose car had been damaged by rioters. He was compensated in accordance to guidelines provided by the government.⁵⁵¹

Partly due to the influence of Syed Ibrahim bin Omar Alsagoff and Dato Onn, a British political report observed that Muslims in Singapore were slowly

⁵⁴⁹ *The Straits Times*, 24th January, 1951. See *The Straits Times*, 18th December, 1950.

⁵⁵⁰ *The Straits Times*, 24th January, 1951.

⁵⁵¹ *Utusan Melayu*, 26th January, 1951 and *The Singapore Free Press*, 2nd and 8th February, 1951.

regaining their trust in the British.⁵⁵² Even so, Muslim elites advocated for victims of rioting, as well as Muslim women who had been widowed or whose husbands had been detained, to be provided with monetary and other forms of aid by the government. The release of those innocent of the charges of rioting should also be expedited to dispel allegations of abuses of justice. Gimson and the Singapore Colonial Secretary assured the public that the government would protect the rights of the innocent.⁵⁵³

- **THREE KEY CHALLENGES IN RECONCILIATION**

The months that followed were devoted to contending with three key challenges which could either redeem or disrupt the colonial administration's efforts to reconcile different parties in both the local and the international arenas. The first challenge was the establishment of an impartial tribunal to compensate various parties who had suffered from the loss of kin and property during the riots. To avoid mismanagement in that regard, the Colonial Office instructed Gimson to obtain and study several reports of tribunals that were conducted in the Gold Coast, Aden and Uganda.⁵⁵⁴ Three distinguished persons, Sir Han Hoe Lim (a Medical Practitioner and a Member of Executive Council), S.C. Leech (the General Manager of Boustead & Co) and L. Cresson (a Local Businessman who was well-known for his public service) was selected as members of the Tribunal

⁵⁵² 'Singapore Political Report for January, 1951', CO 537/7342.

⁵⁵³ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 16th February, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1953), p. B78.

⁵⁵⁴ 'John D. Higham to Sir Franklin Gimson, 16th February, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

Committee upon the invitation of the Singapore Colonial Secretary.⁵⁵⁵ The Tribunal was provided with the following terms of reference:-

1. To inquire into any claims received from any person, other than a person who was a party or accessory to rioting, for compensation for injury (including in the case of fatal injury claims by dependants for compensation), damage, theft, or destruction of property arising directly out of riots in Singapore on the 11th and 12th December, 1950;
2. To assess in the case of damage to property the financial loss suffered in each case on the basis of value at the time of the loss and in the case of personal injuries appropriate compensation; and
3. To recommend to Government, in cases where the claimant shows that he or she has suffered or will suffer hardship, an amount to be paid ex-gratia from Government funds.⁵⁵⁶

Theoretically, such terms of reference seemed ideal and achievable. The practice was altogether different. Recalling his role in considering hundreds of appeals for compensation, Richard Middleton-Smith asserted that the tribunal was unprejudiced in its disbursement of funds.⁵⁵⁷ Such a claim exposes the problems of validity and reliability of oral sources. In his oft-cited essay on oral history methodology, Alessandro Portelli posits that oral testimonies are, more often than not, fraught with 'errors, inventions and myths', tainting facts beyond their actual motifs.⁵⁵⁸ The task of a historian is thus to interrogate and expose prejudiced

⁵⁵⁵ *The Singapore Free Press*, 22nd May, 1951.

⁵⁵⁶ 'Report of the Proceedings of the Riots Claims Tribunal, 19th June, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

⁵⁵⁷ 'Recorded interview with Mr. Richard Middleton-Smith, 27th September, 1999', *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A000215).

⁵⁵⁸ Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: Suny Press, 1991), p. 2.

representations embedded in oral accounts by cross-examining it with alternative sources in order to arrive, as close as possible, at historical truths.

A close examination of the documents relating to the inner mechanics of the tribunal demystifies the rhetoric of impartiality which Middleton-Smith had asserted. In actual fact, the eventual ex-gratia payments were governed by political considerations and bias on the part of the Tribunal Committee. For example, full payment was made for all claims that had been submitted by the Dutch-Consulate.⁵⁵⁹ The tribunal reported that, although the application in respect to the damages incurred by the Dutch Consulate was not supported by sufficient evidence, 'in this case, *diplomatic courtesy would apply* [*italics mine*].' Similar applications by other foreign government agencies were, however, rejected on the grounds that they had presented their claims simultaneously to insurance agencies.⁵⁶⁰ Partiality was also displayed towards relatives of Europeans and Eurasians who were injured or killed during the riots. All applications for compensation from civilians belonging from these two ethnic groups were approved and widows of servicemen were endowed with pension and monetary awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$20,000.⁵⁶¹ It was different in the case of Asians. Only the dependents of twenty-seven-year-old Indian Police Inspector A. Ratnasingham, who was killed near the Joo Chiat police station amidst an attempt to save the life of a Dutch girl, were compensated with a sum of \$2,280 and a pension.⁵⁶² The claims of the dependents of five Chinese men who died during the

⁵⁵⁹ 'Richard Middleton-Smith (Riots Claims Tribunal) to the Colonial Secretary, 6th April, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

⁵⁶⁰ 'Report of the Proceedings of the Riots Claims Tribunal, 19th June, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

⁵⁶¹ 'Casualties arising from the Riots in Singapore in December, 1950 (Ministry of Pensions), 22 May, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

⁵⁶² *The Straits Times*, 15th June, 1951.

riots were categorically rejected. This was contended by a member of the tribunal committee. He was overruled by two other members who provided with evidences from coroner's reports that the five deceased men had died of bullet wounds. It was thus assumed that the five men were rioters who confronted the military. The tribunal report was also silent about applications from dependents of Malays who were killed during the riots, as they were generally perceived as perpetrators of violence and thus undeserving of compensation. \$93,000 was handed out to the dependents of seven persons who were killed, \$28,491.50 for 29 persons who were injured, \$16,774 for damage to personal property and \$71,995.57 for the 116 vehicles which were wrecked by the rioters. The total amount of money disbursed was \$210, 261.07.⁵⁶³ Fully aware of biases inherent within the compensation process, the government ensured that the full details of the tribunal report were never made public. The Singapore Colonial Secretary proclaimed that it was 'not considered to be in the public interest' for the report to be published verbatim.⁵⁶⁴

The second diplomatic challenge which the British were confronted with was that of Maria Hertogh's domicile. British officials in the Colonial and Foreign Offices were particularly anxious that poor management in that respect would further destabilize ties with the Netherlands and the wider Muslim world. Concurring with the advice of the Muslim Advisory Board, Gimson admonished officials in Whitehall to leave the final decision to Maria Hertogh, that is, to either reside with her family in the Netherlands or to be repatriated to Singapore in the custody of Che Aminah. Public opinion in Singapore, according to Gimson, 'would be very strongly opposed to any attempt to force the child back to

⁵⁶³ 'Report of the Proceedings of the Riots Claims Tribunal, 19th June, 1951', CO 953/10/2.

⁵⁶⁴ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 21st August, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B183.

Singapore against her will whatever the Courts might decide on the point of law.⁵⁶⁵ Whitehall officials were unsure of the implications arising from Gimson's suggestion. A British diplomat was dispatched to convince politicians in the Netherlands to support the proposition that Maria Hertogh be given the prerogative to decide on her preferred domicile pending the appeal case in the Singapore High Court. The strategy failed. Having signed a bond of \$7500 on the undertaking that Maria Hertogh would be promptly sent back to Singapore during the appeal hearing in March, the Dutch authorities displayed much reluctance, as the Roman Catholic lobby in the country would not agree to any form of friendly negotiations with Muslims.⁵⁶⁶

It is pertinent to note that such deep-seated animosities did not reflect the overall views of Dutch society. In fact, several Dutch personalities had gone to the extent of advocating Maria Hertogh's repatriation to Malaya. Three Dutch-Muslim organisations, namely the Association of Islamic Students, the Moslem Mission in Holland and the Islam Union, made a public declaration that Maria Hertogh's repatriation to Malaya would remedy the distrust that had developed among Muslim leaders towards the Netherlands.⁵⁶⁷ Several other newspapers in the Netherlands reported on the difficulties encountered by the girl in adjusting to the European way of life.⁵⁶⁸

The problem of language further complicated the already complex state of affairs. Having been nurtured and cared for by Che Aminah, Maria Hertogh was

⁵⁶⁵ 'Sir Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 16th January, 1951', FO 371/93114.

⁵⁶⁶ 'Consulate General of the Netherlands, December 1950', CO 953/10/6.

⁵⁶⁷ *Antara*, 7th February, 1951.

⁵⁶⁸ 'Transmitting General Conditions Report for the Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang consular districts for the period February 1-15, 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/2-2851, NACPM.

only fluent in the Malay language. To address such linguistic barriers, the Muslim Advisory Board nominated a senior member of the organisation to conduct the interview with Maria Hertogh. The British, however, foresaw the danger of being accused of siding with the Muslims. It was anticipated that the Dutch in turn would request for a Roman Catholic representative to be present during the interview, and this would provide the basis for protests by Muslims throughout Malaya. After much deliberation, a well-respected Pakistani Chargé d’Affaires, who was conversant in both the English and Malay languages was selected to conduct the interview with Maria Hertogh. He would be accompanied by a Dutch interpreter.⁵⁶⁹ An unofficial Catholic representative was allowed to attend and the press was to be denied access to the interview.⁵⁷⁰ In August 1951, the Singapore Supreme Court rejected Mansoor Adabi’s appeal against the annulment of his marriage, and granted Maria Hertogh’s parents full custody of their child. The scheduled interview with Maria Hertogh was called off.⁵⁷¹ To cushion the impact of the legal verdict upon Muslim public opinion, Gimson suggested that a study scholarship be awarded to Mansoor Adabi. Higham argued against this suggestion for it would be perceived by Muslims as ‘hush money’.⁵⁷² The idea was subsequently dropped.

The third challenge to the colonial state’s attempt at reconciliation was to be found in the residual grievances arising from comments made by several local Anglophone and European leaders. Malays in Malaya were peeved by Dato Onn’s critique of their innate tendency to act in a rash manner, as seen from the riots.

⁵⁶⁹ ‘John D. Higham to J.D. Murray, 19th February, 1951’, FO 371/93116.

⁵⁷⁰ ‘J.D. Murray (Foreign Office) to B.O.B. Gidden (Colonial Office), 21st May, 1951’, FO 371/93116.

⁵⁷¹ ‘John D. Higham to Franklin Gimson, 10th September, 1951’, CO 953/10/6.

⁵⁷² ‘John D. Higham to Franklin Gimson, 10th September, 1951’, CO 953/10/6.

'Not only the administration', Dato Onn remarked, 'but 80 per cent of Singapore residents lost confidence in us because of the action of a comparative few'. UMNO members were also advised to steer clear of destructive acts, which would disrupt the notable efforts of Malays in governmental agencies. Peace and freedom of the country must be upheld.⁵⁷³ Reflecting upon the incident, Tengku Abdul Rahman highlighted that it marked his 'first disagreement with Dato Onn.'⁵⁷⁴ Muslim and non-Muslim elites in Singapore and Malaya voiced their fundamental disagreement with Dato Onn's negative portrayal of the Malays. A joint statement by the Singapore Muslim League, the Hindu Board, the Malayan Chinese Association (M.C.A.) and the Straits Chinese British Association (S.C.B.A.) stated that it was erroneous to place the entire blame upon all members of the Malay community for the wrongdoings of opportunists and irresponsible persons in the course of the riots. In actuality, a majority of Malays in Singapore had displayed courage in sheltering Europeans and Eurasians who may otherwise have been mauled by the rioters.⁵⁷⁵

Almost a month later, another disturbing comment was made by the chairman of the Singapore Chamber of Commerce. A. F. Taylor told *The Straits Times* that the British should act swiftly and ruthlessly in the face of those who sought to take the law in its own hands. Only then could the possibility of another outbreak of violence be prevented.⁵⁷⁶ The British abstained from siding with either contending parties. Such a policy of inaction provided non-state organisations the crucial space for activism and social change. The Hindu Association, for example,

⁵⁷³ 'Reuter, 25th February, 1951', CO 537/7297, *Majlis*, 26th February, 1951 and *The Straits Times*, 26th February, 1951.

⁵⁷⁴ Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra, *Looking Back*, p. 190.

⁵⁷⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 28th February, 1951

⁵⁷⁶ *The Straits Times*, 31st March, 1951.

formed an inter-communal body to consider aid to innocent persons tried after the December riots. The body also aided in the process of fostering harmony and goodwill between Muslims and non-Muslims in Singapore, whose relations had been undermined by the riots.⁵⁷⁷

In an attempt to further rectify the relationship between Muslims and the colonial state, the British acquiesced to their religious demands and paid tribute to the contribution of the minority community in the development of Singapore and Malaya. The Municipal Commission assented to various requests by both Muslim and non-Muslim civil servants to be relieved of performing tasks that were contrary to their religious beliefs. Such a shift in policy stemmed from the demands of a nurse who applied for an exemption from family planning campaigns. The nurse argued that the campaigns were in opposition to her religious beliefs.⁵⁷⁸ This period also saw the expansion of the eighteen-member Muslim Advisory Board through the incorporation of three prominent personalities: Mahmood bin Abdul Wahab (a former Police Inspector), Syed Abdullah bin Yahya (the President of the Singapore Arab Union) and Haji Jubir Haji Amin (a committee member of *Jamiyah*).⁵⁷⁹

During the launch of the first comprehensive Malay Arts and Crafts Exhibition, Malcolm Macdonald capitalized upon the opportune moment to argue against the 'completely mistaken theory that Malays were an inferior people who needed special protection in their own country.' Rather, the Malays had been as successful as the Indians and the Chinese in the economic and artistic spheres.

⁵⁷⁷ *The Straits Times*, 23rd February, 1951.

⁵⁷⁸ *The Straits Times*, 21st July, 1951.

⁵⁷⁹ *Government Gazette*, No. 66, Vol. VI, May 1951.

Another area, in which Malays had excelled, was in the field of politics and governance. Malcolm Macdonald cited the names of several Malay politicians who had gained the respect of all communities in Malaya.⁵⁸⁰ To a great extent, Malcolm Macdonald's portrayal of the Malays destabilizes Edward Said's essentialist notions that the British and the West in general had consistently upheld denigrating representations of the Orient in the postwar era.⁵⁸¹ Conversely, in an age of decolonization, the Orient had in many instances been appropriated as an equal, if not, dominant partner in an East-West relationship.

• THE MARTYR AND THE PROPHET OF ISLAM

16th October 1951 was a day of tragedy for Pakistanis and Muslims globally. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, was shot twice by a gunman whilst addressing a crowd at Rawalpindi. Muslims in Singapore, especially those of Indian origins, were saddened by the murder of a man who held the title of *Quaid-i Millat* (the Leader of the Nation). Liaquat had, in fact, played a crucial role in the Maria Hertogh controversy as seen through his public statement that the marriage of a thirteen-year old woman was valid from the perspective of Islam, with or without the consent of her non-Muslim parents.⁵⁸² His sudden demise was followed by the closing of all shops and offices owned by Indian Muslims. A mass rally, attended by more than 800 persons, was held at the *Jamiyah* building, with speeches denouncing the assassin. Letters from several Muslim organisations in Singapore were also sent to Karachi expressing a deep

⁵⁸⁰ *The Straits Times*, 11th July, 1951.

⁵⁸¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 255-283.

⁵⁸² 'Commonwealth Relations Office to U.K. High Commissioner in Pakistan, 1st February, 1951', CO537/7302. See also 'British Embassy (The Hague) to Foreign Office, 16th January, 1951', FO 371/93114.

sense of sorrow and condolences for Liaquat, who was regarded as a *shahid* (or martyr) for having died in the war against extremism.⁵⁸³ At the Sultan Mosque, prayers for the deceased were read for three days on end, and food was distributed to the poor and orphans.⁵⁸⁴ Ironically, the assassination of the fifty-six-year old Prime Minister provided a pretext for a public show of British commitment to the protection of and concern for the Muslims of Singapore. As a symbol of grief, the Union Jack was flown at half-mast at the Government House. Gimson seized upon the catastrophic incident to be reconciled with the Muslims in the colony, by attending a mass meeting at the Geylang Stadium, which was attended by 1200 Muslim representatives from local organisations. During his speech, the Singapore Governor expressed his commiseration on the loss of a great leader among Muslims. 'The cause of freedom and of liberty has lost one of its staunchest supporters, and the British Commonwealth of Nations a strong supporter of the tradition for which it stands.'⁵⁸⁵

Muslim leaders in Singapore were generally appeased by the Governor's increasing sensitivity towards issues involving the Muslim community. Their positive feelings towards the colonial regime were cemented by the lifting of restrictions on the celebration of the *Maulidul Rasul* (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday) despite the ongoing Malayan Emergency. On 12th and 13th December, shops and business firms owned by Muslims were closed as many had spent their days in the mosques to recite the Quran and give alms to the needy.⁵⁸⁶ A mass meeting led by Ahmad Ibrahim was held at the Madrasah Aljunied Islamic

⁵⁸³ 'M.J. Namazie to Ghulam Mohammad (Governor-General of Pakistan), 23rd October, 1951, Mansoor Adabi Papers.

⁵⁸⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 18th October, 1951.

⁵⁸⁵ *The Straits Times*, 18th October, 1951.

⁵⁸⁶ *Utusan Melayu*, 12th December, 1951.

School. Attended by more than 500 children from eighteen religious schools, the event saw the presence of Christian priests and members of the I.R.O., such as Dr. H.B. Amstutz, who were invited to deliver goodwill speeches. Amstutz stressed that the citizens of Singapore were 'facing a new way of life; an ideology which does not know God. We must come closer together to establish in the hearts of our people the worship of God.'⁵⁸⁷ Less than two weeks later, the ideology of ungodliness which Amstutz had shunned emerged in the form of a film entitled *David and Bathsheba* which triggered another cycle of protest.

Opening in Singapore on Christmas Day, *David and Bathsheba* was based on the Old Testament depiction of King David, laced with fictional elements. It was screened at all local cinemas, one of which was the famous Alhambra Theatre at Beach Road. 40,000 tickets were sold in just the first week after its release, setting a new record for the highest ticket sales since August 1945. Although controversial, the film had been scrutinized and approved by the Federation Cinematographic Appeal Committee, which consisted of representatives from the Muslim, Christian and other major religious faiths in the colony. In spite of that, Muslims in Singapore were displeased by selected scenes in the film. They contended that a prophet of Islam had been wrongly portrayed as hedonistic and susceptible to sexual overtures. Three days after the screening of the film, Ahmad Ibrahim told the *Melayu Raya* newspaper that a beloved prophet of Islam had been depicted as a tyrant. This was in opposition to the teachings of the Quran which states 'that the Prophet Daud (David) is a man of justice and there were in him all forms of goodness till the traits of arrogance in oneself would be cleansed through

⁵⁸⁷ *The Straits Times*, 13th December, 1951 and *Utusan Melayu*, 13th December, 1951.

repentance and the seeking of forgiveness.⁵⁸⁸ He called for the film to be banned because it was no less than an insult to Islam and Muslims. Linked to this was a petition sent by the Muslim Advisory Board and *Jamiyah* urging the immediate withdrawal of the film. Several other Muslim leaders and organisations threatened to boycott businesses and organise protest meetings. The main line of objection voiced by all dissenters was that it was against Quranic precepts to portray visual representations of David and to claim that he had committed adultery.⁵⁸⁹ British intelligence observed that a small yet politically-oriented group of South Indian Muslims were the chief instigators of the protest. They were described as being 'guided by the heart not the head' and had planned to use the film as a catalyst to re-ignite Muslim interest in the Maria Hertogh case.⁵⁹⁰

Europeans, Eurasians and adherents of the Christian faith in Singapore and Malaya displayed diverse reactions towards the protests. A Christian priest in Malacca dissented against the screening of the film and all posters which sought to promote it, for the reason that much emphasis was placed upon David's failings. This was a divergence to the true spirit of Christianity. Catholics in Singapore took on a less aggressive stance and recommended that some parts of film be censored to avoid further controversies.⁵⁹¹ Although the atmosphere of fear and suspicion was gradually subsiding, Europeans and Eurasians in Singapore were reported to be perturbed by Muslim protest against the film.⁵⁹² In an initial response to the protests and statements made by Christian leaders, the Cathay

⁵⁸⁸ *Melayu Raya*, 28th December, 1951.

⁵⁸⁹ 'Muslim Affairs in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, 1952', CO 1022/434.

⁵⁹⁰ 'Singapore Political Report for January 1952', CO 1022/206.

⁵⁹¹ *Melayu Raya*, 5th January, 1952.

⁵⁹² 'Annual Reports for British Territories in S.E.A., 1951', A1838/280.

Organisation stated that the film had prior approval from the Censorship Board and that none of its Malay viewers have expressed disapproval since its release.⁵⁹³

The British were thus caught in a dilemma over whether to uphold their liberal policies relating to films or to submit to the conservative demands of their Muslim subjects. The first tactic was to garner the support of Muslim leaders in the Federation to endorse the continual screening of the film. Through this, the British hoped that inflamed feelings among Muslims in Singapore would slowly subside. Quite the contrary, the *Qalam* magazine singled out Dato Onn as a 'lackey' in cahoots with the British in regard to the film and other issues concerning Islam. The President of UMNO was described as '*mengutamakan masalahat dirinya sahaja* (concerned with his own well-being).' *Qalam* went on to highlight British tactlessness at a time when they needed the help of Muslims in the fight against the spread of communism.⁵⁹⁴

To circumvent an escalation of emotions surrounding the issue, Jack Evans of the Singapore Film Censorship Board announced that the film had been withdrawn from all cinemas. According to the manager of the Alhambra Theatre, the film would have been featured for another week had it not been for the withdrawal imposed by the government. *David and Bathsheba* was subsequently sent for review by the Film Appeals Board.⁵⁹⁵ Rajabali Jumabhoy and Ahmed Ibrahim were nominated to represent the Muslims of Singapore.⁵⁹⁶ In Malaya, a

⁵⁹³ *Utusan Melayu*, 5th January, 1952.

⁵⁹⁴ 'Singapore Political Report for January 1952', CO 1022/206. See *Qalam*, Bilangan 19, February, 1952.

⁵⁹⁵ *The Straits Times*, 10th January, 1952 and 'Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, 15th January – 15th February, 1952', CO 537/7343. See also, FO 371/101223.

⁵⁹⁶ *The Straits Times*, 11th January, 1952.

well-respected nationalist and literary figure, Zainal Abidin bin Ahmad (Za'ba), was appointed to be a part of the review committee. Za'ba too was troubled by the negative ways in which the Prophet David had been portrayed in the film.⁵⁹⁷ By mid-January, the film, along with all forms of advertising related to it, was banned in Singapore. Such developments within the Malay-Muslim community in Singapore dominated the Governors' Conference in Malaya which was held on the same month. Along with other pertinent issues, the Singapore Governor mentioned that:

During the last year, the susceptibilities of the Muslim population in Singapore have shown to be very easily aroused. Representation have been made in the local press on a number of incidents, perhaps some of them minor in themselves but which have definitely shown that the Muslim community is very sensitive to its position in Singapore. The latest agitation about the 'David and Bathsheba' film is a case in point and I am sure that the wise counsels of the more responsible members of the Muslim Advisory Board would have been followed if there had not been below the surface this readiness to take offence at any imagined slight to Islam. I think the position must be carefully watched and it is imperative to have someone like Che Abu Bakar who can exercise an important influence both in any position in the Public Relations Dept and as Secretary of the Muslim Advisory Board...There appears to be necessity therefore to restore the confidence of the Malay community in Singapore and in approaching Muslim problems this attitude must be borne in mind.⁵⁹⁸

British officials who were present at the meeting were convinced that the roots of Muslim rage lay in the fact that they were a socially marginalized and economically depressed community. To alleviate such strains, a resolution was

⁵⁹⁷ 'Za'ba to Mohd Yusof, 18th January, 1952', Surat-Surat Za'ba Kepada Mohd Yusof.

⁵⁹⁸ 'Extract of Minutes of Malaya/Borneo Governors' Conference, 15th January, 1952', CO 1022/429.

passed to the effect that a Secretariat of Malay Affairs consisting of two British and a Malay official would be formed. The Secretariat's main task was to provide more well-grounded insights and solutions to the challenges faced by the Malays.⁵⁹⁹

As the ire of Singapore Muslims subsided, the Sultan of Kedah decided to ban the screening and sale of *David and Bathsheba* on the grounds that it 'will create a religious controversy in the country.'⁶⁰⁰ In May 1952, another minor protest was launched by Muslims in Singapore over the publication of a picture of Prophet Muhammad in the May issue of *Newsweek*. Fully aware that Muslims were opposed to all pictorial representations of Muhammad, the British ensured that the magazine was kept out of circulation in the colony.⁶⁰¹ Another preemptive measure that was undertaken was to delimit the activities of Roman Catholic missionaries on the island. Selected pastors and priests that were brought to Malaya after having been deported from China were advised to concentrate their energies on converting the Chinese. This was to 'avoid offending Muslim susceptibilities among Malay, Indian and Indonesian elements in Singapore. We (the British) have had experience in the Hertogh riots in the inflammatory possibilities which exist between Muslim and Roman Catholics and therefore Muslim religious leaders must be given no cause to allege that proselytizing of Muslims is being given.'⁶⁰² The Muslim community was also pleased by the release of six prominent leaders who had been arrested for the part they had

⁵⁹⁹ 'Extract of Minutes of Malaya/Borneo Governors' Conference, 15th January, 1952', CO 1022/429.

⁶⁰⁰ *Straits Budget*, 13th March 1952.

⁶⁰¹ 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report: 15th February - 15th March, 1952', FO 371/101224 and 'Baldwin to the Secretary of State, 9th June, 1952', RG 59, 746F.00/6-652, NACPM.

⁶⁰² 'Wilfred Blythe to Malcolm Macdonald, 20th April, 1952', CO 1022/379.

played in the riots of December 1950 and the pardoning of those sentenced to death. To further reclaim support for the colonial administration, Muslims were permitted to organize island-wide celebrations of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday in November 1952.⁶⁰³

- **CONCLUSION – THE RETURN TO NORMALCY**

In conclusion, the *David and Bathsheba* episode was the final hurdle which the British had to overcome in their efforts to reconcile the colonial state with various parties in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. By the end of 1952, a shift in attitudes among Muslims in Singapore was palpable yet it is misleading to assert that the entrenched feelings against the British as rulers had been fully assuaged. Realising the futility of engaging in violent acts to achieve their objectives, Muslim trade union activists, journalists, teachers, writers and middle-class professionals became deeply involved in party politics to advance their religious and social interests. At a meeting held within *Jamiyah*'s premises, Singapore UMNO (or SUMNO) was formalized as a section of UMNO's branch in Johore. More than fifty Malays and Arabs registered themselves as members of the new political party. Syed Ahmad bin Mohammed Alsagoff was elected to be its first President. Ahmad Ibrahim and Darus Shariff, two personalities who had played crucial roles and had gained widespread popularity in the midst of the Maria Hertogh controversy, were elected as Vice-President and Secretary respectively.⁶⁰⁴ The party's membership increased steadily in the months that followed, with a strong following among servicemen in the Navy, the Army and

⁶⁰³ 'Political Report for the period 1st to 15th November, 1952', CO 1022/207.

⁶⁰⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 31st December, 1951 and *The Straits Times*, 31st December, 1951.

the Police Force. In July 1953, a motion was passed by the UMNO Central Branch in Kuala Lumpur for SUMNO to participate in the Singapore elections in alliance with the Singapore branch of the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA).⁶⁰⁵ Three months later, SUMNO members publicized an appeal for unity between the Malays and Indonesians in Singapore and declared 'that the time has arrived for the two races to expel the imperialists.'⁶⁰⁶

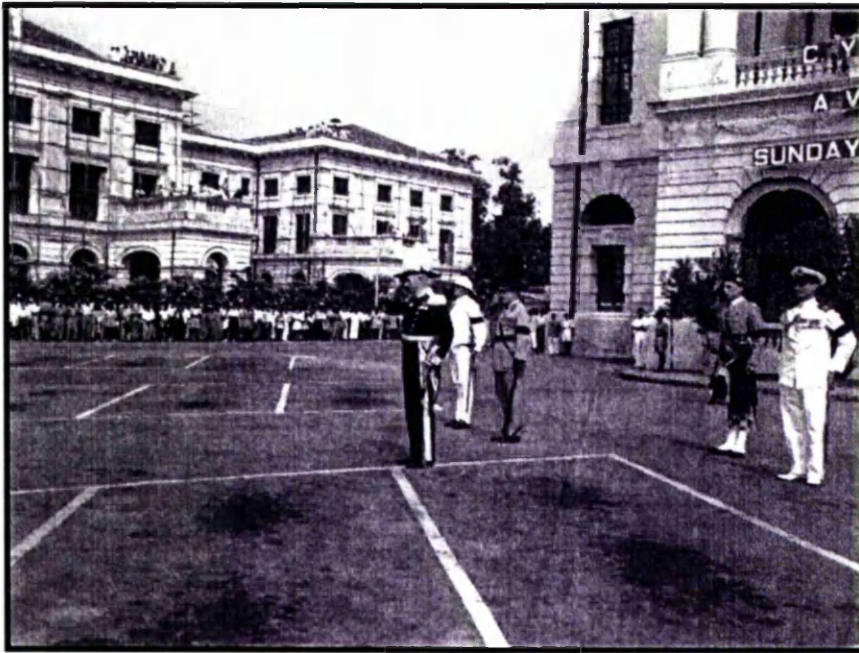
In the realm of diplomacy, relations between the British and the Dutch had been restored. The Dutch, to be sure, saw themselves as victors in the entire controversy after having won the custody of Maria Hertogh to her natural parents and after having been awarded compensation for losses incurred during the riots. Friendly interactions between Europeans and Eurasians and Malays in particular and Muslims in general returned to normal towards the end of 1953. In his highly acclaimed travel book, *Voices of Asia*, the famous American novelist and travel-writer, James Albert Michener, wrote about a Caucasian man who, although beaten to near death during the riots, had subsequently decided 'to turn my back upon Christianity, confess my sins and become a complete Malay Muslim. I believe now that my future lies with the Malays.'⁶⁰⁷ This is a somewhat exaggerated account of Muslim-Christian relations in Singapore, but there is a grain of truth in it. Although marriages between Catholics and Muslims were regarded as socially taboo, such practice was not uncommon in the ensuing years.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁵ 'Political Report for the period 29th July to 12th August, 1953', CO 1022/207.

⁶⁰⁶ 'Political Report for the period 2nd to 18th September, 1953', CO 1022/207.

⁶⁰⁷ James Albert Michener, *Voices of Asia* (Secker & Warburg, 1952), p. 131.

⁶⁰⁸ "Author's Interview with Ms. Hedwig Anuar, 24th May, 2006". Hedwig Anuar is a Eurasian lady of Portugese-Catholic origins. She was an undergraduate at the University of Malaya in



Installation Ceremony of Sir John F. Nicoll as Governor of Singapore
Source: National Archives of Singapore



Opening Ceremony of the Muslim College at Klang, Selangor
Source: Syed Ali Alsagoff

Singapore when the riots broke out and was married to a Malay-Muslim in the late 1950s. Hedwig was the first Singaporean Director of the National Library, from 1965 to 1988.

CHAPTER 7

Reform

Having identified the structural weaknesses of the colonial state during the riots, the British were set firmly upon the path of reform. The police force, education, marriage and child adoption policies were areas in which rapid transformation were set in motion. Still, the initiative for reforms was not left unchallenged, for the British were faced with indifference, disdain and the counter-propositions of local elites in Singapore. At several crucial junctures, the British had the upper hand. There were, inevitably, occasions when compromises had to be made in favour of views from 'below'.

This chapter will examine in detail the processes of reforms in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. I shall demonstrate that although the British engendered changes in the existing legal and administrative structures, they sought to preserve the integrity of the colonial bureaucracy. The underlying goal was not only to transform institutions and laws, but also to ensure a tighter grip on the colonized people and enhance the power of the colonizers. Unlike previous chapters, this chapter will be divided into four sub-sections, which provide critical expositions of the evolution of four areas of reforms that the British sought to initiate as well as the resistance and challenges encountered.

• THE POLICE FORCE

David M. Anderson and David Killingray aptly argue that ‘as the most visible symbol of colonial rule, in daily contact with the population and enforcing codes of law that upheld colonial authority, the colonial policeman – be he a European officer or a local native recruit – stood at the cutting edge of colonial rule.’⁶⁰⁹ In light of this observation, it is of no surprise that the colonial administration’s reformist strategy was directed largely towards the police force which, as discussed in earlier chapters, had proved to be ineffective in dealing with the Maria Hertogh riots. Reforms of the Singapore police force were focused upon four vital areas. The first was in the realm of manpower, where improvements were instituted within the existing leadership structure, the rapport within the rank and file, the training of existing staff, the revision of salary scales and the introduction of new welfare benefits. Intensive recruitment programmes were also devised to attract young men from different ethnic and educational backgrounds into the police force. The second area of reform was focused on the decentralization of the organisation to ensure a smooth internal and external coordination between the police and other sectors of the colonial administration. Thirdly, new weaponry and other forms of technologies were purchased to deal more swiftly with riots and disturbances in the colony. Last of all, the British attempted to re-establish the trust between the police and the public by reshaping the repressive image of the organisation to one more accommodative and friendly.

⁶⁰⁹ David M. Anderson and David Killingray, “Consent, Coercion and Colonial Control: Policing the Empire, 1830-1940”, in David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority, and Control, 1830-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 1-2.

The first step undertaken by the British was to assign the Hong Kong Commissioner of Police, Duncan W. Macintosh, to conduct a preliminary study of the Singapore police force. His main tasks were to identify the fault lines and suggest ways of developing a more robust police force, so as to ensure a tighter enforcement of the colony's laws. Proposals that were regarded as 'urgent' in nature would be promptly implemented whilst awaiting the findings of the Commission of Enquiry.⁶¹⁰ At the same time, feedback was solicited from experienced police chiefs, such as Stanley Grisewood Taylor (an ex-Inspector-General of Police in Bengal).⁶¹¹ This was followed by the re-appointment of sixty Harbour Board Auxiliary police lieutenants, who had been scheduled for disbandment at the end of the year. Appointed for a period of six months, the police lieutenants were to come to the aid of the regular police pending the recruitment of new constables into the force.

One of the predicaments faced by the British was the overwhelming number of Malay constables in the Singapore police force. In a report submitted on 27th December 1950, Macintosh highlighted that the organisation had placed itself in a precarious position by having relied upon the services of the Malays, who were a minority ethnic group within a predominantly Chinese colony. This was compounded by the fact that the Malay police officers had shown much reluctance in dissuading and arresting their co-religionists during the Maria Hertogh riots. A three-prong solution was proposed to overcome the quandary.

⁶¹⁰ *Proceedings of the First Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th December, 1950* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B443 and *The Singapore Free Press*, 20th December, 1950.

⁶¹¹ 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary No. 12, December 1950', CO 537/ 5311. See also 'Malaya: Monthly Political Intelligence Report (1950), reported on 28th December, 1950', CO 825/82/3.

The first was to entice able-bodied men from the Chinese, Eurasian, European and Indian communities in Singapore into becoming an integral part of the force through a modified terms of employment. The Gurkha contingent was to be expanded and salary-scales as well as other welfare benefits have had to be radically revised. Such changes, according to Macintosh, would lure the Chinese in particular to consider the police force as a lifetime career.⁶¹²

Campaigning in parallel to these proposed reforms, members of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce appealed to the Chinese in Malaya to consider the police force as a viable employment option.⁶¹³ An announcement was also made in regard to the formation of a Volunteer Special Constabulary Emergency Squad. No age limit was imposed, though all appointments were temporary. Selected candidates would undergo basic police training to assist the Singapore Police Force in the course of its ongoing reforms.⁶¹⁴ The Straits Chinese British Association (or S.C.B.A.), in turn, nominated Ong Tiang Wee (the President of the S.C.B.A) and Goh Hood Kiat (a Municipal Commissioner and a member of the S.C.B.A) to serve on the newly established Police Advisory Committee. Consisting of six members from the various ethnic groups of Singapore, the committee's essential task was to provide in-depth advice on recruitment matters and strategies to mend the declining public confidence towards the police force.⁶¹⁵ The *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1951* states that the Advisory Committee proved to be 'of great assistance to the

⁶¹² 'Executive Council Minutes of Meeting, 28th December, 1950', CO 940/56.

⁶¹³ *The Straits Times*, 22th December, 1950.

⁶¹⁴ *The Singapore Free Press*, 20th December, 1950.

⁶¹⁵ *The Singapore Free Press*, 27th December, 1950.

Commissioner.’⁶¹⁶ Nonetheless, the drive to entice Chinese in Singapore to join the police force was a resounding failure, as many were unreceptive to the recruitment campaigns.

The chief underlying cause of such indifferent attitudes is to be found in the stereotypical assumptions held by the British which determined their policies towards the Chinese in Singapore. Perceived as a group of individuals who were motivated by personal greed and financial gain, the British erroneously assumed that the Chinese could be easily enticed into the police fraternity should there be improvements in terms of wages and other financial benefits. Closely linked to this was the culture of fear that developed amidst the communist insurgency which provided the crucial reason for the Chinese refusal to join the police force. The Chinese were troubled by the prospect of reprisals and persecution of relatives and friends by the communists in Malaya and China in the event of open collaboration with the British.⁶¹⁷ Furthermore, there was the practical consideration that, should the communists emerge victorious in the long-drawn battle with the British, they would be placed in a disadvantageous position after having sided with the colonial regime. The fourth reason was a result of historical processes. The painful experiences of wars, rebellions and corrupt policing in mainland China gave rise to an invented tradition of detesting all forms of soldiering and policing among the Chinese in Singapore and Malaya.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁶ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1951*, p. 3.

⁶¹⁷ Anthony J. Stockwell, ‘Policing during the Malayan Emergency, 1948-1960: Communism, Communalism and Decolonisation’, in David Killingray and David M. Anderson (eds.), *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and The Police, 1917-1965* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 117 (pp. 105-126).

⁶¹⁸ ‘William R. Langdon to Department of State, 20th December, 1950’, RG 59, 746F.00/12-2050, NACPM and ‘Singapore Political Report for February, 1951’, CO 537/7342.

On the eve of the year 1950, the CID declared its move to decentralize investigatory operations by establishing sub-branches in the Northern and Southern parts of Singapore. In allaying public suspicions towards the government, CID spokesman emphasized that decentralization was not a consequence of the Maria Hertogh riots. Plans had been laid out several months prior to the riots in line with developments in England.⁶¹⁹ This was not the whole truth of the matter. As seen from Chapters Three and Four, the plans for decentralization corresponded with the rigorous surveillance and arrests of suspected protagonists in the aftermath of the riots. In line with this, the Gurkha contingent was expanded to include thirty new highly-trained officers. This was the first of several other batches of Gurkha officers which arrived in Singapore in the months that followed.⁶²⁰ In an interview with *The Straits Times*, W.J Parks (the Acting Deputy Commissioner of Police) stated that the number of officers in the Gurkha contingent was projected to increase to a grand total of 500.⁶²¹ Riot drills involving the Gurkha troops, Malay policemen and the military were also staged in public for three days on end as part of the police force's efforts to regain the confidence of the masses and to demonstrate the formidable nature of the newly-reformed force. Termed 'Operation Popper', the drills exhibited the use of tear gas and improved communications in the event of mass violence.⁶²²

A paramount issue facing the Singapore Governor and the Secretary of State for the Colonies during this period was the appointment of a competent successor to R.C.B. Wiltshire. The new Commissioner of Police, Gimson wrote in

⁶¹⁹ *The Straits Times*, 27th December, 1950.

⁶²⁰ *The Straits Times*, 17th January, 1951.

⁶²¹ *The Straits Times*, 24th January, 1951.

⁶²² *Utusan Melayu*, 30th January, 1951 and *The Straits Times*, 30th January, 1951.

a telegram to James Griffiths, should manifest a commanding personality. He should also demonstrate an ability to restore the shattered morale of the police force. Another important trait was the aptitude to put an end to the factionalism which had resulted in the breakdown of internal coordination during the riots. Gimson opined that the most suitable person for such a Herculean task was John P. Pennefather-Evans. Born in 1894, Pennefather-Evans had served for more than twenty-seven years in the Malayan Police. In 1941, he was appointed as the Commissioner of Police in Hong Kong and was instrumental in drafting plans for the re-organisation of the force. Spending much of the period of Japanese occupation in the Stanley Internment Camp, upon the Allied victory, he returned to Britain for early retirement due to poor health. To Gimson, Pennefather-Evans has had the advantage of being able to speak the Chinese and Malay dialects which would enable him not only to communicate with the men within the rank and file but also to enhance the effectiveness of the police in assessing the threats arising from communist propaganda.⁶²³ Pennefather-Evans was thus appointed on a one year contract which began in February, 1951.

The new Commissioner of Police's foremost initiative upon assuming the post was to conduct visits to all police divisions in Singapore. Discussions were held with inspectors and staff sergeants in the force to uncover their grievances and restore morale which was at its lowest ebb.⁶²⁴ Similar sessions with lower-ranking Malay constables were organized with the presence of the members of the Muslim Advisory Board. In assuaging widespread perceptions among the Muslim

⁶²³ 'Franklin Gimson to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 8th January, 1951', CO 537/7245.

⁶²⁴ 'Appendix to Brief of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Meeting with the Prime Minister on Monday the 10th September', CO 537/7247.

policemen that they had transgressed religious limits by arresting fellow Muslims during and in the aftermath of the riots, particular emphasis was given to highlighting that justice was above colour, race or religion. Pennefather-Evans' also stressed that the policemen's substandard performance during the riots was a thing of the past.⁶²⁵

In spite of these efforts, the political report for the month of February 1951 revealed that the testimonies of senior police officers to the Commission of Inquiry had revived the lack of public confidence in the police force.⁶²⁶ Insurance companies, as a case in point, doubled their premiums after having assessed the reliability of the police force in dealing with civil disorders.⁶²⁷ The situation was made worse by press cynicism concerning the reforms made within the police force. The *Singapore Free Press*, for example, highlighted the need for 'a gentler Police' to counter-balance the 'tough' image which had been propounded for many decades. The editorial went on to argue that public confidence in the police had not improved since the outbreak of the riots. Moreover, ignorance with regards to the organisation and functions of the police force pervaded the psyche of the masses. An established perception among the men of the street was an image of police officers who accepted bribes and performed poorly during the riots. 'The ordinary man must realize that to hold important information concerning peace-breakers indirectly jeopardizes his own safety. On the other hand, the police should make an effort to establish more cordial relations with the

⁶²⁵ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1951*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 1 and *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 16th October, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B306.

⁶²⁶ 'Singapore Political Report for February, 1951', CO 537/7342.

⁶²⁷ 'Transmitting General Conditions Report for the Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Penang consular districts for the period February 1-15, 1951', RG 59, 746F.00/12-2851, NACPM.

people whose servants they are.’⁶²⁸ Several other newspapers highlighted the pervasive public opinion that Malay policemen would not be effective in dealing with criminal activities within a Chinese-dominated colony.⁶²⁹

Largely due to such criticisms, the morale within the police force in Singapore was said to have ‘improved superficially at any rate’. In a noble attempt to improve tarnished relations between the Malay policemen and the civil authorities, leaders of the UMNO party called for the institutionalization of religious classes in the police force so as to inculcate Islamic values such as loyalty and commitment within the organisation.⁶³⁰ The colonial administration was ambivalent about the idea, for the fear of accusations of outright favouritism towards a particular religious group in the force. The suggestion was thus shelved. Nor did the British respond to the plethora of critiques launched by the press. However, much energy and resources were devoted towards a rapid effort to enhance the image of the police, coordination and equipment needed to quell any future riots.

At a meeting with the British Cabinet, General John Harding noted that the establishment of Joint Operations Rooms at Fort Canning and other districts in Singapore had improved communication and coordination between the Military, the Police and the civil administration. There was still much to be done to augment the low morale of military and police officers who had been prisoners of

⁶²⁸ *The Singapore Free Press*, 7th February, 1951.

⁶²⁹ *The Straits Times*, 30th March, 1951 and “Extract from PMR 2/1951”, CO 537/7302.

⁶³⁰ ‘Monthly Political Intelligence Reports: Federation of Malaya, March – April, 1951’, CO 537/7343.

war during the Japanese Occupation.⁶³¹ To offset the problems of morale and recruitment, new anti-riot technologies were thus introduced to enhance the efficacy of the Singapore police force. The most potent among these was the 'triple-chaser'. As the name suggests, these enhanced special tear gas grenades were designed to split open in mid-air and spread gas over a wide area. Their sole purpose was to inflict terror and confusion upon rioters. Thirty-six gas guns, 800 tear gas shells, 200 smoke bombs and 250 smoke grenades for training purposes were purchased upon the approval of the Singapore Legislative Council. The total cost of all equipment purchases since the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots amounted to \$76,000.⁶³² In July 1951, an announcement was made by Pennefather-Evans that the salaries, accommodation and promotional prospects of the existing police officers would be substantially revised. At the same time, the British government increased the frequency of anti-riot drills by conducting them on a bi-monthly basis with the joint cooperation of the military.⁶³³

Writing in the *Qalam* magazine, a retired Malay Superintendent of the Police force, in turn, highlighted the continual importance of the Malay police in curbing the rise of criminal activities in the colony. He explained that the Malay policemen should maintain their fullest loyalty to the colonial state on the condition that they must not be coerced to comply with tasks that were contrary to their religious beliefs. Abdul Wahab contended that the Maria Hertogh riots were a clear case in which the Malay policemen had to face up with acts of violence by

⁶³¹ 'Cabinet: Malaya – Note by the Joint Secretaries, 9th March 1951 [GEN. 345/7]', CAB130/65.

⁶³² *The Straits Times*, 25th May, 1951.

⁶³³ *The Straits Times*, 13th June, 1951, *The Singapore Free Press*, 23rd July, 1951 and *The Straits Times*, 24th July, 1951.

hooligans who were not defenders of Islam.⁶³⁴ Publicity was also given to several officers who were awarded medals for their bravery during the riots. One of the recipients was Corporal Wan Ishak bin Abdullah from the Army Depot Police who was presented with a King's Commission for courage shown during the first day of the riots. Wan Ishak had rescued Mrs Crowley, Mrs Taylor and her small son from a mob that was attacking them. He escorted the three Europeans to a safe place and, with aid of the military, transported the injured persons to a police station.⁶³⁵

Mention has been made of the Leach Report's diagnoses of the factors that had led to the riots, the censure of several senior police offices and the reforms that were proposed. While the report exposed the failure of the Malay police officers in the fulfilment of their duties, it was stated that 'this failure should not be given a significance beyond the context of the specific situation in which it occurred. They (the Malay police) possess sterling qualities and are capable of fulfilling their duty in an emergency, provided that they are contented and are properly led, as their brothers in the Army have shown.'⁶³⁶ In an interview two days after the publication of the Leach Report, Pennefather-Evans stressed that the police force would soon put its crisis-stricken past behind it provided that the plans which he had laid down were implemented thoroughly. 'I want to make my organisation more of a police force and less of a military one - a force for the ordinary policing of the city. I want to get an educated police force - that is a force of men to look after and protect the public in the same way as the police in other

⁶³⁴ *Qalam*, Bilangan 12, July 1951.

⁶³⁵ *The Singapore Free Press*, 6th June, 1951.

⁶³⁶ "Riots: Singapore; Report of Commission of Enquiry: Leach Report (1951), p. 67", CO 537/7248.

democratic countries.’ The Commissioner also hoped to train his men along the standards that had been defined in England, that is, to be capable of handling dangerous situations without resorting to violence.⁶³⁷ A new cohort of Malay Assistant Superintendents would also be recruited to ensure the development of a more co-coordinated and cohesive organisation. A major challenge faced was the lack of educational qualifications among the Malays within the rank and file in particular, and the colony in general. As a short term measure, several existing officers would be promoted to the required positions and were expected to perform their duties in accordance to the standards placed upon them.⁶³⁸

A final judgment on the Maria Hertogh Appeal case was delivered on 30th August, 1951, in an atmosphere of unexpected calmness. With the exception of several incidences of verbal remarks made against the court’s decision, there were no other signs of protest from the Malay police officers. The morale of the police rank and file was said to have progressed, albeit at a very slow pace.⁶³⁹ To enhance public confidence in the police force, a number of reforms that had been set in motion were continually publicised. In the realm of coordination and management, the Commissioner of Police was provided with a secretary from the Inspectorate. A Deputy Commissioner was appointed, along with several other Assistant Commissioners who were stationed at major branches around the island. The Assistant Commissioners were each endowed with authority over one or two police stations. They were also tasked to conduct regular meetings with the men under their charge, in order to ensure closer cooperation. Besides that, direct

⁶³⁷ *The Singapore Free Press*, 9th August, 1951.

⁶³⁸ *The Straits Times*, 17th August, 1951.

⁶³⁹ ‘Monthly Report for the Month of August, 1951’, CO 717/194/12 and ‘Singapore Political Report for August, 1951’, CO 537/7342.

telephone lines were installed to correct the problems of poor radio communications and poor coordination of road blocks, as seen during the December riots. The riot drill manual was revised and complemented by an intensive training programme for all officers on the island. A Riot Squad was established similar to that of the Shanghai Riot Unit which quelled more than 1,000 riots without firing a shot. The founder of the Shanghai Riot Unit, Lieutenant Colonel W.E. Fairbairn was seconded to Singapore for three months to train the squad.⁶⁴⁰

To counter-balance policing through the use force with that of consent, officers were made to patrol on foot at all times. Wired fences at police stations would be kept open at night so as to convey a more 'open' and less 'self-protective' outlook. The use of police cars was restricted to emergency operations, and light armoured cars would only be deployed in the face of widespread riots. Obsolete equipment, which had resulted in high numbers of police and civilian casualties during riots, were replaced with enhanced technologies such as police helmets 'one and a half pounds lighter than the Standard Army steel helmets' and D.N. Smoke Shells, more commonly known as 'vomit gas'.⁶⁴¹ Closer cooperation with the Public Relations Department had also been forged to ensure an immediate enlistment of the services of highly qualified civil government officials, trained in methods of restoring public confidence in times of crisis.⁶⁴²

⁶⁴⁰ 'Malaya - Monthly Political Intelligence Report - 15th June-15th July, 1952', CO 1022/208 and *The Straits Times*, 14th September, 1951.

⁶⁴¹ *The Straits Times*, 14th November, 1951 and "Monthly Report for the Month of August, 1951", CO 717/194/12.

⁶⁴² 'Appendix to Brief of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Meeting with the Prime Minister on Monday the 10th September, 1951"', CO 537/7247.

In the area of welfare and personnel management, reforms were made in terms of the working hours. The gruelling twelve-hour shift was reduced to eight hours. A rest day in every week was made compulsory for all police officers. Educational programmes, refresher and post-training courses were delineated for officers pending promotion. A selected group of senior officers was sent to the joint Federation/Singapore Police College in Malaya to pursue advanced training courses. Pensions and gratuities to dependents of officers who were killed during the riots and in other acts of violence thereafter were swiftly disbursed. Bonuses were also paid out to officers who displayed especially good performance and courage in the line of duty. The 200-man Volunteer Special Constabulary, which proved to be crucial in aiding the police force, saw a dramatic increase in personnel. According to Victor Seah, who was a Lieutenant in the Volunteer Special Constabulary during that period, recruits 'came from all walks of life – fishermen, taxi drivers, shopkeepers, salesmen, white-collar workers, technicians, teachers, corporate managers and professionals from private as well as the public sectors.'⁶⁴³ It was forecasted that the numbers would reach a grand total of 1,500 by the end of the year.⁶⁴⁴

Partly due to the reforms that had been implemented, police effectiveness in the clearing of small scale riots and other forms of unlawful assemblies improved significantly.⁶⁴⁵ 'I don't wish to say by any means that all is well', said Gimson in his letter to John Higham, 'but the prospects are brighter, possibly, than

⁶⁴³ Seah, *A Life Worth Reliving*, pp. 133-134.

⁶⁴⁴ 'Appendix to letter from Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 12th September, 1951', CO 717/194/12.

⁶⁴⁵ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1951*, p. 27.

they have been for some time.⁶⁴⁶ The prospects for recruiting Chinese and members of other ethnic groups into the force were, however, not at all bright. Thus far, recruitment strategies had been focused upon attracting Chinese recruits who were residing in Singapore and the neighbouring islands, and not those in mainland Malaya. Hence, only six Chinese, two Indians and two Eurasians were selected out of a small number who responded to the allure of higher wages and other benefits.⁶⁴⁷

Pennefather-Evans' contract with the Singapore Police Force was coming to a close at the end of February 1952. Although he had served for merely a year, the Commissioner's popularity was growing rapidly among members of the police fraternity. Personal charm, the ability to foster a sense of camaraderie and the will to implement radical reforms within the once fragmented organisation were the key factors which could have well accounted for his prominence.⁶⁴⁸ Even so, the civil administration was apprehensive about lengthening Pennefather-Evans' contract with the police force. The implicit reasons for such a contradiction in policy are shrouded in mystery due to the paucity of historical sources. One possible reason would be that there was a need to appoint a new Commissioner in conjunction with the arrival of the new Governor, John F. Nicoll. The other possible explanation lay in the politics of the Commission of Enquiry. There was too much of a typical policeman's attitude in Pennefather-Evans to the extent that he had defended men under his charge who were accused by civil officials of an outright failure in the performance of their basic duties. Such an outlook on the

⁶⁴⁶ 'Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 28th September, 1951', CO 717/194/12.

⁶⁴⁷ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1951*, p. 7.

⁶⁴⁸ *The Straits Times*, 4th January, 1952.

part of Pennefather-Evans may have been objectionable to Gimson and other higher-ranking officials within the civil administration.

The selection of a credible successor was far more complex than expected. Two candidates - Nigel Morris and W.D. Robinson - were considered. General Gerald Templer, the successor to Henry Gurney as High Commissioner of Malaya, had a low opinion of Robinson, whom he labelled as 'uncooperative'. Similarly, Wilfred Blythe was not particularly impressed with Robinson's disposition as a would-be Commissioner. The newly appointed Singapore Governor, John Nicoll, was concerned with 'stop-gap appointments', preferring instead a long-term appointment for the prospective Commissioner. In Nicoll's perspective, Morris had an edge over Robinson, due to the respect and trust which he had established with senior officers in the police force. Although Morris was 'still under cloud' due to the riots and the findings of the Leach report, Nicoll's personal discussions with influential personalities from Singapore and Malaya revealed that a majority were either neutral or in support of Morris's appointment as Commissioner.⁶⁴⁹ The President of Malayan Chinese Association, Dato Tan Cheng Lock, went so far as to send a telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London in support of Morris' appointment. Tan Cheng Lock wrote that Morris was the 'right person for the post being well liked and respected by all in Singapore and Federation. Besides he is one of the few remaining experienced officers who understand problems of this country particularly the Chinese. Singapore has fared well under his direction during the Emergency. Consider continuity of leadership highly desirable at this crucial stage. I am expressing

⁶⁴⁹ 'John F. Nicoll to John D. Higham, 21st May, 1952', CO 1022/167. See also, 'Department of the Army (Singapore) to Washington D.C., 3rd March, 1952', RG 59, 746F.00/3-352, NACPM.

considered opinion of majority here.’⁶⁵⁰ Upon the formal declaration of Morris’ appointment, the Colonial Office dispatched an official to investigate the reactions of the Malayan police officers who were then attending a course at Ryton-on-Dunsmore in Warwickshire. A majority expressed their strong support for Nigel Morris.⁶⁵¹

In the interim, more plans were devised to recruit non-English speaking Chinese into the police force. The intensive efforts to entice English-educated Chinese into the organisation had failed tremendously to the point that, by the end of 1952, there were only 294 Chinese out of a force of 3,350 policemen. By virtue of their higher educational background, Chinese officers were mostly inspectors. Only a handful was of the lower ranks. For that reason, Nigel Morris highlighted the need to train the existing staff in the Chinese, Malay and the English languages, so as to avoid the rise of alienation, miscommunication and lack of coordination within the police force upon the entry of a new batch of non-English speaking officers.⁶⁵² A representative of the Singapore Police Force was sent to Hong Kong to study the conduct of courses and the establishment of a training unit for Chinese recruits.⁶⁵³

After two years of active campaigning, Muslim police officers were elated when the Police Muslim Benevolent Association saw the light of the day in 1953. Established as an independent body, the association’s sole objective was to advance the religious and cultural interests of the Muslim members of the Force.

⁶⁵⁰ ‘Tan Cheng Lock to Oliver Lyttelton, 7th April, 1952’, Folio 5, Tan Cheng Lock papers.

⁶⁵¹ ‘John D. Higham to John F. Nicoll, 21st June, 1952’, CO 1022/167.

⁶⁵² *The Straits Budget*, 8th May, 1952.

⁶⁵³ ‘Extract from ‘Malayan Bulletin No. 65, 25th May, 1952’, CO 1022/167 and *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1952*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1953), p. 1.

Partly due to a whole array of charitable efforts that had been carried out in the previous years, the Association's funds amounted to \$17,923.⁶⁵⁴ Another positive development was the appointment of two Muslim religious teachers who conducted classes so as to deter policemen from the lure of vice. Lectures were conducted twice daily in two police divisions.⁶⁵⁵

To sum up, whereas the Maria Hertogh riots had tarnished the image of the police force, reforms in the aftermath proved crucial in the restoration and enhancement of the police force's ability to handle routine violence that characterized the colony. The budget allocation for the Police Force escalated rapidly from \$9.3 million in 1950 to \$25.5 million in 1952, the highest total budget when compared with other British colonies in the same period.⁶⁵⁶ The Anti-Corruption Branch, which was deemed to be inefficient in addressing the problem of bribery in the police force, was replaced by the establishment of the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) in 1952. This may partly explain the relatively small increase in manpower as officers who were found guilty of committing graft were more severely punished in contrast to the preceding years.⁶⁵⁷ Consecutively, the Riot Squad was renamed as the Police Reserve Unit,

⁶⁵⁴ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1953*, (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 11.

⁶⁵⁵ *The Straits Times*, 4th November, 1952 and *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1953*, p. 11.

⁶⁵⁶ *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1950*, p. 12; *Annual Report of the Singapore Police Force, 1953*, p. 40 and David M. Anderson and David Killingray, "An orderly retreat? Policing the end of empire", in David M. Anderson and David Killingray (eds.), *Policing and Decolonisation: Politics, Nationalism and the Police, 1917-65* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 15.

⁶⁵⁷ Jon S.T. Quah, "Wielding the Bureaucracy for Results: An Analysis of Singapore's Experience in Administrative Reform", *Asian Review of Public Administration*, 8, 1, (1996), p. 3.

whose functions were expanded to include the control of labour unrest and violence perpetrated by secret societies.⁶⁵⁸

In the years that ensued, rapid improvements and modernization were sustained along similar lines to those that have been discussed above. Recounting his role within the reform process, Nigel Morris held the view that the aftermath of the riots saw the breaking down of perceptual barriers between the police and the Muslims in Singapore, a religious grouping which had not been treated with empathy by the colonial administration.⁶⁵⁹ Indeed, for more than four years after December 1950, Singapore remained free from major outbreaks of violence. The next serious riot was on 13th May 1954, when Chinese students took to the streets to protest against the National Service Ordinance. The rioters were effectively crushed by scores of policemen who were criticized for their indiscriminate employment of 'excessive force'.⁶⁶⁰

• EDUCATION

Whilst the police force underwent swift and comprehensive reforms shortly after the quelling of the riots, reforms in education, marriage and child adoption policies experienced a time lag. One compelling factor that resulted to this delay was an urgent need on the part of the British administration to restore its authority which had been seriously undermined by the riots. The maintenance of law and order by an enhanced policing body was given the highest priority in

⁶⁵⁸ John Drysdale, *In the Service of the Nation* (Singapore: Federal Publications, 1985), p. 18.

⁶⁵⁹ "Recorded interview with Mr. Nigel Morris, 2nd April, 1996", *Oral History Interview, National Archives of Singapore* (A001745).

⁶⁶⁰ Yeo Kim Wah, *Political Development in Singapore* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1973), pp. 191-192.

realizing this goal. The British were also cognizant that reforms made to marriage policies, education and child adoption necessitated the support of local elites on the island, who were already embittered by earlier attempts at reforms. Gradualism was thus seen as the best course of action. On that note, this section will examine British efforts at reforming educational policies in Singapore in the aftermath of the riots.

‘Education’, as Ranajit Guha explains, ‘had always ranked high on the agenda of colonialism.’⁶⁶¹ The need to enhance the colonial educational agenda became all the more pertinent amidst the Maria Hertogh controversy. Relatively neglected for many years, the full-time *madrasahs* (Islamic religious schools) and other Malay language schools were perceived by the British and Muslim elites in Singapore as potential hotbeds of dissent, traditionalism, communalism and fanaticism. Aljunied and Dayang have argued that the years following the Second World War saw an increase in the enrolment of Muslim children into Malay language schools and *madrasahs* in Singapore. One of the factors which could account for such developments was the lack of governmental regulation in determining the choices of educational instruction for the Malays. Prior to the Japanese Occupation of Malaya, the colonial state had maintained a *laissez faire* policy whereby private schools - *madrasahs* being one among an array of religious and vernacular-based schools - were given the prerogative to formally establish themselves as educational institutions and enrol as many students as they deem fit. As a result, in the years following the Japanese surrender, private schools became entrenched as the preferred educational institutions for most

⁶⁶¹ Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, p. 81.

parents who held particular religious, communal and/or ideological inclinations. Secondly, there was a widespread and unfounded anxiety among Muslim parents with regards to the growing influence of Christian missionary activities within English-based schools. Press sensationalism around the Maria Hertogh case portrayed as a battle between Islam and Christianity worsened the situation, in that it heightened Muslim suspicion of all efforts by the British to initiate improvements in the education of Muslims in Singapore. Due to these factors, *madrasahs* and other Malay-language schools in Singapore flourished in a socio-historical context in which the English language and education were perceived as a colonizing and missionizing tool of the *kafirun* (or unbelievers).⁶⁶²

Hence, by the end of 1951, it was reported that the total number of students in the six full-time *madrasahs* in Singapore had increased to 947 from 700 in the previous year.⁶⁶³ Even the modernist-oriented Malay Women's Welfare Association expressed its concern about the lack of available places for Muslim girls to attend religious schools.⁶⁶⁴ In point of fact, the *madrasahs* avoided all forms of collaboration with the British and the Anglophone Muslim elites. Owned by philanthropists from Hadrami and Javanese families namely, *Wak Tanjong*, *Al-Sagoff*, *Al-Junied*, *Al-Kaff* and *Bamadhaj*, the administrators of the *madrasahs* regarded the institution as the last surviving bastion of Islamic knowledge and a bulwark against the corrupting influences of modernisation. They were thus adverse to the incorporation of non-religious subjects, such as English and

⁶⁶² Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied and Dayang Istiaisyah Hussin, "Estranged from the Ideal Past - Historical Evolution of Madrasahs in Singapore", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (JMMA), 25, 2, (2005), p. 255.

⁶⁶³ *Annual Report - State of Singapore: 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 68.

⁶⁶⁴ *Utusan Zaman*, 3rd October, 1951.

Mathematics and devoted much of their curriculum to the study of the Quran, the *Hadith* (the Islamic Traditions), the Arabic language, Islamic History and Jurisprudence. Moreover, a large number of the teachers were ex-students of the *madrasahs*, with only a handful who were educated in universities in the Middle East.⁶⁶⁵

Fully aware of such prevailing attitudes, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddiqui, Ahmad Ibrahim and Syed Ibrahim Alsagoff were resolved that the enhancement of Islamic knowledge in the full-time *madrasahs* and the Malay language schools must begin with the creation of a whole new generation of qualified teachers, who would be well equipped with both religious and secular fields of knowledge, as well as a deep awareness of the challenges confronting Muslims. Discussions on the concept of a proposed Muslim College, whose sole objective would be to train religious teachers with modern pedagogical methods, had begun as early as 1948. Yet, owing to the lack of funds and support from the British government, the idea of a Muslim College did not go beyond piles of written proposals. The British monitored all meetings related to the establishment of the College, and declined repeated appeals for financial support, as they saw no real benefits in sponsoring an institution for teachers who would render their services to private schools, rather than for the schools that had been built by the colonial state.⁶⁶⁶ Such stance shifted upon the outbreak of the Maria Hertogh riots.

During a Legislative Council meeting on 22nd May, 1951, Ahmad Ibrahim highlighted the danger of the 'insidious propaganda and wiles of anti-religious and

⁶⁶⁵ Aljunied and Dayang Istiaisyah Hussin "Estranged from the Ideal Past", p. 256.

⁶⁶⁶ 'Malayan Security Service, Political Intelligence Journal No. 3/1948, 15th February 1948', CO 537/3751.

anti-moral movements' that had sowed the seeds of dissension between various communities in Singapore. To arrest such negative influences, he stressed the importance of fostering moral and spiritual values in schools, particularly in Malay schools. Ahmad reiterated his appeal for governmental support for the establishment of a Muslim College which would train teachers to impart such values to their students.⁶⁶⁷ The Singapore Colonial Secretary responded by stating that Ahmad 'has raised the rather thorny point of religious education in our schools in Singapore.' The matter was subsequently brought to the attention of educational advisers in the colony.⁶⁶⁸

Due largely to the relentless activism of *Jamiyah*, support from Muslim and non-Muslim communities in Singapore and Malaya for the establishment of the Muslim College swelled in the following months. Consequently, the British in Singapore and Malaya were swayed in a similar direction. Several members of the Malay royal families of the states of the Malay Peninsula as well as other grassroots organisations pledged their financial aid, along with other facilities. A generous sum of \$10,000 was donated by the Johore Government to the Muslim College Fund. Other state governments responded with pledges that amounted to tens of thousands of dollars.⁶⁶⁹ When interviewed by the local press on the establishment of a Muslim College, Reverend Robert Greer of the Presbyterian Church in Singapore mentioned that religious dignitaries of Islam 'occupy a very important place in the life of the Muslim community. It should accordingly be the duty of that community to establish every facility for the provision of sound

⁶⁶⁷ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 22nd May, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. B86.

⁶⁶⁸ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 22nd May, 1951*, p. B88.

⁶⁶⁹ *Melayu Raya*, 1st January, 1952 and *The Straits Times*, 10th October, 1953.

education and training for its future religious leaders.’ Likewise, Reverend Tracey K. Jones of Wesley Church asserted that the ‘principle of freedom of thought and freedom of operation in higher education is a sound Christian principle. A Christian should recognize this for all forms of higher education.’⁶⁷⁰ In July, 1953, a survey on the conditions in religious schools throughout Malaya and Singapore was carried out by the Federation of Malay Students’ Organisation. Information was collected on the welfare, curriculum, pedagogical methods, facilities and financial challenges faced by these schools. The report and the recommendations of the survey were discussed and later submitted to the government for consideration.⁶⁷¹

Newspapers such as *The Straits Times* also helped to accelerate the change in governmental mindset by highlighting the benefits of British cooperation with Muslim organisations in Singapore towards remedying the weaknesses of Islamic education on the island. In an editorial comment on 12th February 1953, it was mentioned that a majority of Muslim teachers in Singapore and Malaya had obtained Islamic knowledge in Egypt, Mecca or Pakistan. Although these teachers had played a satisfactory role in the existing religious schools, more could be achieved if a similar institution of religious education was established in Malaya.⁶⁷² Admittedly, the British too had developed deep concerns towards the inflow of revivalist and militant ideologies, brought into Malaya and Singapore by students who had pursued religious studies in South Asia and the Middle East.⁶⁷³ As these threats became more apparent, the establishment a Muslim College was

⁶⁷⁰ *The Straits Times*, 14th February, 1953.

⁶⁷¹ *The Straits Times*, 24th July, 1953.

⁶⁷² *The Straits Times*, 12th February, 1953.

⁶⁷³ ‘Review of Factors Liable to Affect Internal Security, Singapore, as on 1st October, 1953’, CO 1022/248.

seen as a necessity, as it could assist in preventing the growth of anti-colonial ideologies from the ranks of Muslim teachers and educators.

By the end of 1953, efforts towards enhancing the dismal state of full-time *madrasahs* in Singapore and the establishment of the Muslim College had gained the full support of the British. At a Legislative Council meeting on 15th December 1953, Ahmad Ibrahim highlighted that *madrasahs* should be treated on the same footing as the other vernacular schools and therefore provided with the necessary financial support.⁶⁷⁴ The response by D. McLellan (the acting Director of Education) was a stark departure from the official position held two years earlier: 'I see no reason why we should not include Arabic schools in this Scheme.'⁶⁷⁵ The British had also come to the decision that the Muslim College was to be built at Klang in Selangor. The college started its first lessons on 24th February 1955, with a batch of 55 students from various states in Singapore and Malaya. It was officially opened by the Sultan of Selangor, Sir Hishamuddin al-Haj Alam Shah, on 8th April 1955.⁶⁷⁶ Along with the establishment of the Islamic Studies Department in the University of Malaya in 1959, there was 'a general realisation in the *madrasahs* of the need to improve their standards of Islamic education and to tailor the graduate to the requirements of the Muslim College in the interest of their own survival.'⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁴ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 15th December, 1953* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. B390.

⁶⁷⁵ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 15th December, 1953*, p. B391.

⁶⁷⁶ *Utusan Melayu*, 9th April, 1955.

⁶⁷⁷ Zahoor Ahmad, "Growth of Islamic Education in Singapore", *World Muslim League*, 11, 3, (1967), p. 42.

Together with this, the colonial administration also sought to introduce what was called the 'Reorientation Plan', which was to take effect from 1st January, 1952. Through the plan, the British hoped to equip students in the sixty Malay language schools with the knowledge of the English language and other necessary knowledge and skills so as to enable them to cope with the rapid changes of the post-war years. The colonial administration envisioned that the plan would open up a wider range of career choices for the Malays in order to help them to compete successfully with other ethnic groups on the island. Under the Plan, the Malay language was to be employed as the language of instruction during the first three years of schooling. The English language would be taught concurrently in the first year. From the fourth to seventh year of primary education, all subjects would be taught in English, with the exception of Malay Literature. In this way, the Malays would be better prepared for secondary school education, in order to qualify for the Cambridge School Certificate.⁶⁷⁸

Though well intended, the Reorientation Plan was introduced at an inopportune time, that is, in the midst of the development of a culture of suspicion between Muslims and the colonial regime. In an attempt to gain public approval for the plan, the Singapore Governor announced that the idea was supported by Malay teachers and a large number of Malay parents.⁶⁷⁹ Malay elites in Singapore were not at all convinced. They protested against what was seen as a sinister plot by the British to dilute the attachment of Malays to Islam and the *adat* (the local

⁶⁷⁸ *Annual Report 1951 - Department of Education* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 79.

⁶⁷⁹ Harold Edmund Wilson, "Educational Policies in a Changing Society: Singapore, 1918-1959" (Unpublished PhD Dissertation submitted to the University of British Columbia, 1969), p. 172. See also, Zahoor Ahmad, "Policies and Politics in Malay Education in Singapore, 1951-1965" (Unpublished M.A. Dissertation submitted to the University of Singapore, 1969).

custom). Representatives of a dozen of Malay organisations maintained that the plan had been conceived without prior consultation. The most vehement resistance came from members of the Singapore Malay Teachers' Union who were concerned with their decreasing relevance in the colony and inevitable unemployment in the years to come.

Though a minority, several prominent Malays in Singapore were supportive of the plan at the initial stages. An example of such counter-reaction was the Singapore Malay Union, which criticized the Malays for their chauvinistic approach towards education. The organisation campaigned for the importance of learning the English language. Pamphlets were distributed to villages and *kampongs* in the colony and the neighbouring islands, urging the Malays to work towards the attainment of university degrees, both locally and in England.⁶⁸⁰ Such efforts were, however, cut short by the mounting resistance to the government's proposal, which became particularly acute upon the formation of the Malay Education Council (or MEC, known in Malay as *Majlis Pelajaran Melayu* [MPM]). Consisting of fifty-two Malay/Muslim organisations in Singapore, the MEC issued petitions and public protests against the plan. Their efforts received full support from all leading Malay newspapers and organisations on the island.⁶⁸¹ The British were left with no alternative. Towards the end of 1955, the Reorientation Plan was abandoned to make way for the enhancement of Malay language education on the island.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸⁰ *The Straits Times*, 1st September, 1952.

⁶⁸¹ *Utusan Melayu*, 13th August, 1954.

⁶⁸² T.R. Doraisamy et. al., (ed.), *150 years of Education in Singapore* (Singapore: TTC Publications Board, 1969), p. 110 and Zahoor Ahmad, "Policies and Politics in Malay Education in Singapore, 1951-1965", pp. 15-26. See also, *Utusan Zaman*, 6th December, 1955.

- **MARRIAGE POLICIES**

The movement towards instituting a proper system of recording and arbitration of marital conflicts among Muslims in the colony has been pursued by the Muslim Advisory Board in Singapore some few years prior to the December riots. The Board was however faced with lukewarm responses from the colonial authorities who did not recognize the crucial need to address high rates of divorce, unreported marriages and the seeking of services from unqualified *kathis*. Such apathy on the part of the British had also resulted in a delay in the appointment of a *mufti* (a Muslim scholar who interprets the laws of Islam) whose expertise could have been sought in order to mitigate the occurrences of marriages like that of Maria Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi.

To address such impediment, Ahmad Ibrahim appealed to the Singapore Governor for the latter's endorsement of a scheduled executive meeting to decide on a suitable candidate for the post of *mufti*. The task of the *mufti* would be to organize regular meetings with all *kathis* in Singapore so as to impart the knowledge of secular as well as Islamic laws. The *mufti* would also ensure that the *kathis* were guided by clear procedures and ethical codes. 'If they violate any of the code, they will be punished and asked to resign. Unfortunately, we do not have a Department in Singapore. If we have such organisation here, I am sure in future there will be no misunderstanding and confusion about what is Muslim law and what is the Colony law, and the laws of the country and the Muslim laws will be properly classified once and for all, so that we shall have peace and prosperity

again and forever.’⁶⁸³ Gimson thanked Ahmad for his insights, but was reticent about the appointment of a *mufti*.

The members of the Muslim Advisory Board were not deterred by the Governor’s indecisiveness. Rather, in a private meeting with Gimson, Syed Ibrahim (Chairman of the Muslim Advisory Board), seized upon the opportunity to highlight the high prevalence of child marriages between Malays and Chinese girls in the colony, insinuating the similar nature of the case of the marriage between Maria Hertogh and Mansoor Adabi. Chinese girls would, ‘to the consternation of their parents or guardians, appear before a *kathi* and state they had been converted to Islam. Thereupon the *kathi*, without further ado, would perform the marriage ceremony.’⁶⁸⁴ Relating his visit to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Syed Ibrahim informed the Governor of Islamic edicts (or *fatwa*) that had been issued in other British colonies to curb the practice of child marriages. *Muftis* in these colonies had admonished *kathis* to disregard the conversion and matrimony of Muslim men with children who had not obtained prior approval from their parents.⁶⁸⁵ Details of the conversation between Gimson and Syed Ibrahim were made known to officials in London. Almost immediately, officials at the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office were instructed to conduct a thorough search for documents pointing towards the implementation of the above-mentioned *fatwa*. None was found. Realizing the positive implications of the *fatwa* upon British relations with Muslim subjects within Britain’s post-war empire, John Higham at the Colonial Office sought the assistance of the Foreign

⁶⁸³ ‘Copy of an Extract from Legislative Council Proceedings, Colony of Singapore, 19th December 1950, p. 477’, CO 537/7302 and *Straits Times*, 20th December 1950.

⁶⁸⁴ ‘Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 15th January, 1951’, CO 953/10/6. See also, *The Straits Times*, 13th January, 1951.

⁶⁸⁵ ‘Franklin Gimson to John D. Higham, 15th January, 1951’, CO 953/10/6.

Office to conduct a meticulous search of their archives. He was later informed by legal advisers of the futility of the search.⁶⁸⁶

By early February 1951, debates regarding the marriage patterns of Muslims in Singapore were gaining momentum. One of the key issues that attracted media attention was the high rates of divorce among the Malays. Female Muslim activists such as Che Zaharah, agitated for the establishment of a *Syariah* (Islamic Law) Court, which was to be endowed with the power to deter men from divorcing their wives without valid reasons and to curtail the widespread practise of secretly keeping 'another wife in town or in some other part of the Colony.'⁶⁸⁷ Unsympathetic to the radical activism of the Singapore Malay Women's Welfare Association led by Che Zaharah, male Muslim elites in Singapore sought to reassert their place as the rightful leaders of the Muslim community by forming a sub-committee to assess and suggest necessary changes to the existing legislation pertaining to Muslim marriages. A month later, the issue of divorce and uncontrolled marriages were brought forth to the Singapore Legislative Council. Hindu and Sikh members of the Council expressed their full support for a review of the laws pertaining to marriage, as the challenges faced by Muslims were analogous to those in their own communities. A British member of the Council, John Laycock, reiterated the need to implement the defunct Marriage Age Bill, which would invalidate all marriages of children under the age of sixteen. Unsurprisingly, Muslims in the colony expressed their outright opposition to the Bill. Laycock later stated that Muslims would be excluded from the provisions of the bill. Such a hasty retraction was met with criticism from other members of the

⁶⁸⁶ 'John D. Higham to Sir Franklin Gimson to, 15th February, 1951', CO 953/10/6.

⁶⁸⁷ *The Straits Times*, 16th February, 1951 and Djamour, *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore*, p. 83.

Council. Balwant Singh, for example, questioned: 'Why was the bill, when first presented to the Council, not excluded [*sic*] Muslims from its provisions? Why did Laycock do this a month after? Could it be that the storm of Muslim protest that lashed at this Bill gave the veteran politician an inkling of what was going to happen in the coming Legislative Council Elections?'⁶⁸⁸

After two months of heated exchanges, representatives of the Hindu and Sikh communities took exception to the provisions of the Laycock Bill. The British consented to the demands of the minority communities in a conscious attempt to limit public dissensions against the colonial state. Yet such a non-interventionist policy in the realms of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh affairs mutated into intervention by other means, that is, by amending the Civil Marriage Ordinance (No. 9, 1940) and the Christian Marriage Ordinance (No. 10 of 1940).⁶⁸⁹ Speaking in defense of the proposed changes, during the second reading of the bill, John Laycock argued that he had hoped 'that a measure of this kind would be regarded as a social reform, which indeed it truly is, and that it would be treated on that basis only, instead of involving religious discussion or argument at all. Unfortunately that was not possible. I then indicated that I was prepared to move an exemption excluding Muslims from the operation of the Bill...Now, I cannot see why the law which is good in England is not good here in Singapore. I regard it solely as a measure of social reform.'⁶⁹⁰

⁶⁸⁸ *The Straits Times*, 7th April, 1951.

⁶⁸⁹ *The Straits Times*, 2nd June, 1951. *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 19th June, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. B115.

⁶⁹⁰ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 17th July, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. B164-165.

Laycock's statements led to widespread resistance from Christian groups in the colony, which were particularly incensed by the high-handed implementation of the reforms. A representative of Protestant Bishops in Singapore disputed Laycock's rationale and, as an alternative, propounded an environmentally deterministic theory, which stated that children reach maturity at an earlier age in Asia than in Europe. Hence, the age limit of sixteen to be imposed by the bill was impractical for an Asian colony. Another Christian priest urged Laycock to withdraw the bill, claiming that Christians saw the bill as an infringement of their religious rights. The priest went on to state that the bill would 'militate against' one of the most organized religious groups on the island.⁶⁹¹

Coming in between the two opposing parties, Legislative Councillor P.F. de Souza highlighted that the negative reactions from leaders of various Christian churches in the colony had arose from the lack of empathy on the side of the colonial state. The objection against the bill, de Souza added,

is not against the age limit imposed. The objection is that if this age limit is approved, it would be hardship on the few cases that crop up now and then, particularly of girls being pregnant under age of sixteen, who would perhaps, not be in a position to marry during their pregnancy, and would consequently bring into the world bastard children...Now pastors of the various denominations are experienced in worldly affairs, and they weigh up the pros and cons of every particular case and sometimes do come to the conclusion

⁶⁹¹ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 17th July, 1951*, p. B164-165.

that marriage would be the lesser of two evils....I move to an amendment that this Bill be referred to a Select Committee with quorum of three.⁶⁹²

P.F. de Souza's proposal was seconded by Nazir Mallal and agreed upon by the Council. The Select Committee would consist of three members of the Legislative Council. Feedback would be sought from the Right Reverend Bishop of Singapore on behalf of the Anglican Church, the Right Reverend Bishop of Malacca on behalf of the Catholic Church, and the Right Reverend Archer of the Methodist Church.⁶⁹³

Still, protests from Christians in Singapore remained unabated. The Right Reverend Henry Wolfe Baines (the Anglican Bishop of Singapore) sent an open letter to John Laycock stating that representatives of the various Christian churches had not been appropriately consulted on the amendments to the Christian Marriage Ordinance and that the Christian populace was offended by Laycock's disregard of their views. Catholics in Singapore, Bishop Baines contended, were unwilling to acquiesce to governmental policies limiting the age of marriage to sixteen years. 'Let me repeat that, though I am uncertain whether the method you have chosen will by itself achieve the reform you have had the courage to promote and in which I hope all right-minded citizens will follow you, and though I regret the fact that your failure to consult the Christian leaders has put them in an ambiguous position.'⁶⁹⁴ Such polemics persisted for three months and despite the

⁶⁹² *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 17th July, 1951*, p. B164-165.

⁶⁹³ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. C383.

⁶⁹⁴ *The Straits Times*, 24th July, 1951.

united opposition from the heads of churches in Singapore, the amendments to the Civil Marriage and Christian Marriage Ordinances were pushed through.

The Select Committee report, which was presented at the Legislative Council meeting in December 1951, highlighted the resistance from members of the Christian minority community in Singapore (see Appendix 2). P.F. de Souza, who was a member of the Select Committee, supported the amendment to the Civil Marriage Ordinance but recorded his disagreement with the enactment of a revised Christian Marriage Ordinance. He criticized the government for contradicting its policy of religious freedom. Several churches in Singapore joined in the fray by stating that such hasty reforms by the Government would not change the current practices and 'that education in the matter should come before legislation.'⁶⁹⁵ British officials were dispatched to organise meetings with Christian leaders in the colony, to give them more detailed explanations on the rationale behind the revision of the Christian Marriage Ordinance. Christian leaders were not at all persuaded. On 17th June, 1952, the Laycock Marriage Bill was passed by the Legislative Council.⁶⁹⁶ The episode is an excellent example of how the British enactment of several policies in a colonial setting had the *reverse* effect of that intended, dispossessing minorities in Southeast Asia of their religious rights.⁶⁹⁷

It is pertinent to note, however, that such interventionist measures towards the Christian marital policies were an exceptional case in which the British had

⁶⁹⁵ *The Straits Times*, 19th December, 1951.

⁶⁹⁶ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 17th June, 1952* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1955), p. B191-193.

⁶⁹⁷ See Chapter One, p. 8.

ignored all forms of resistance from the minority community and imposed policies in accordance with their intended motives. In fact, a policy of non-interference was sustained as seen from Muslim efforts to establish a *Syariah* court. As it happens, the Muslims were radically divided on the issue of the roles and functions of the proposed court. Much time, for example, were devoted to debating the choice of which school of Islamic jurisprudence would serve as the ideological basis of the court.⁶⁹⁸ A majority among the Arabs and the Malays subscribed to the *Shafi'i* school and maintained strong reservations about the acceptability of the *Hanafi* interpretation of marriage laws that was followed by most Indian Muslims in Singapore. Prominent Muslim leaders belonging to the Shiite sect were in support of the practice of *muta'ah* (or temporary marriage)⁶⁹⁹, which was deemed by the Sunni majority as fornication, adultery, and prostitution that was garbed with Islamic rhetoric. Divisions were even more disparate between the defenders of traditionalist interpretations of laws, as opposed to those who subscribed to a modernist mode of Islamic thought. A case in point was that of the members and sympathizers of the Malay Women Welfare Association, who although fully aware of the likely reactions of religious elites in Singapore and Malaya, stepped up their demands for legislation that would curb the practice of polygyny among Muslims in Singapore and Malaya. Muslim men were chided for their dishonourable practice of adopting non-Muslim daughters for the purposes of marriage. Male religious leaders responded indignantly to what seemed to them to be an irreligious stance and ineffective way of reforming an established marital culture. In their eyes, Che Zaharah and her supporters had succumbed to western influences and were corrupting Islam from within. Muslim women, they argued,

⁶⁹⁸ *Utusan Melayu*, 14th January, 1952 and *The Straits Times*, 14th January, 1952.

⁶⁹⁹ For a detailed study of the origins and practise of *mut'ah*, see Shahla Haeri, *Law of Desire: Temporary Marriage in Shi'i Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1989).

should know their appropriate place in society. They should refrain from all forms of political activities and agitation towards social reform, which was essentially a male domain.⁷⁰⁰

Statistics of the day leaned towards reforms that were proposed by the women activists. Research on the marital culture among Muslims in Singapore revealed that there were 2091 reported marriages and 1119 divorces from January till September 1952. 127 couples remarried after having been counselled by local *kathis*. For that reason, the Muslim Advisory Board accepted Che Zaharah's proposal on the need to amend the Mahomedan Marriage Ordinance, which was enacted in 1936.⁷⁰¹ Although the term 'Mahomedan' had been substituted with 'Muslim' by a bill that was passed some months earlier⁷⁰², it took the colonial administration more than nine months to publicise a newly revised ordinance that would address the high divorce rates among Muslims.⁷⁰³ Beyond the expectations of the British, such a delay brought Muslim organisations in Singapore to a consensus on the functions and roles of the *Syariah* court. Singapore UMNO and the Singapore Malay Union sent several letters to the newly appointed Singapore Colonial Secretary, William Goode, to hasten the establishment of the court.⁷⁰⁴ The *Persatuan Melayu Semenanjung* in turn called for a conference of all Malay organisations in Singapore to deliberate on the establishment of the *Syariah* court and other matters pertaining to Muslim affairs.⁷⁰⁵ By November 1953, a detailed

⁷⁰⁰ *Melayu Raya*, 10th September 1952, 24th November 1952 and *Melayu Raya*, 22nd January 1953.

⁷⁰¹ *The Straits Times*, 25th November, 1952.

⁷⁰² *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 16th September, 1952* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1953), p. B306.

⁷⁰³ *Utusan Melayu*, 28th August 1953.

⁷⁰⁴ *Utusan Melayu*, 8th September 1953.

⁷⁰⁵ *Utusan Melayu*, 28th September 1953.

blueprint of the *Syariah* Court and the management of the *kathis* had been forwarded to the government by the Muslim Advisory Board.⁷⁰⁶

It is significant to highlight that the *kathis* later became highly professionalized and regulated as a result of Muslim activism and the support that came from the colonial state.⁷⁰⁷ In 1957, the scope of the Muslim Ordinance was widened to include the registration of marriage, the regulation of the *Syariah* Court, property matters and other miscellaneous issues. The Ordinance also transferred a variety of issues pertaining to Muslim personal laws to the jurisdiction of the *Syariah* Court.⁷⁰⁸ In the following year, the *Syariah* Court was instituted. Its effectiveness in addressing the problems of polygyny and divorce was far-reaching. By 1964, the rate of divorce among Muslims in Singapore had plunged to 17.5% from 51.7% in 1957. The practice of uncontrolled marriages was also successfully constrained through legislation.⁷⁰⁹ By an unintended irony of history, such rapid socio-religious transformations and positive developments within the Muslim community in Singapore had their roots in the Maria Hertogh controversy and the riots that had torn families apart.

• CHILD ADOPTION

Closely related to marriage policies was the practice of unregulated child adoption in Singapore. This was yet another predicament with which the British

⁷⁰⁶ *The Straits Times*, 9th November, 1953.

⁷⁰⁷ *Annual Report - State of Singapore: 1957* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1958), p. 183.

⁷⁰⁸ M.B. Hooker, *Islamic Law in South-East Asia* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 102-103.

⁷⁰⁹ Ahmad Ibrahim, "Developments in the Marriage Laws in Singapore since 1959", in *Malayan Law Journal*, (June 1979), p. 39.

government had to contend in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. In reforming laws governing this aspect of the lives of the common people, the British did not encounter any form of overt resistance from local organisations and leading personalities on the island. This was due partly to the growing awareness of exploitative acts and excesses committed by parents who had adopted children on an informal basis. To be sure, the Maria Hertogh appeal proceedings had exposed the problem of forceful conversions of adopted children and of marriages below the age of puberty. To ensure the support of the leaders of the Chinese, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities, multiple meetings and discussions were organized to address the issue of child adoption. Studies on adoption practises were also carried out by the colonial administration before the passing of new laws and the implementation of new policies.

Judith Djamour notes that the institution of adoption was particularly widespread among the Malays and Chinese in Singapore in the 1950s. Although most Malays belonged to the Shafi'i school of Islamic jurisprudence, they did not necessarily conform to selected laws and rulings that have been stipulated. This could be clearly seen in the norm of declaring their adopted children as natural children and the placing of the name of the foster father along with the state-registered name of the child. For example, instead of naming an adopted Chinese child, Fatimah binte Abdullah - 'Abdullah' connotes 'the servant of Allah' and not a particular person, which was in line with Shafi'ite teachings - most Malays would name the child, Fatimah binte Kassim, Kassim was the name of the foster father. Another divergence from Shafi'ite teachings was that the adoption process was often informal, reliant upon mutual trust between parties involved and were

lacking in proper documentation. A child would be handed over to adoptive parents in exchange for a bottle of wine, a fowl and a nominal cash gift ranging from \$5 to \$50.⁷¹⁰

A survey conducted by the Social Welfare Department in the first half of 1951 revealed that sixty children had been given up for adoption. By the end of the year, the numbers had peaked at 1,031. These figures were based on formal registration by parents who had sought the assistance of the Department. The cases of undeclared adoption must have been, without a doubt, much larger. It was found that a large proportion of parents had given up their children for adoption because of economic hardship arising from having more than nine or ten children. Some informants mentioned that their decision was contingent upon the advice of fortune-tellers who predicted that a given child would bring misfortune to the natural parents. Connected to this was the stigma of having too many daughters. The Chinese, for that matter, tended to view girls as a burden and a waste of financial resources because they would contribute more to housework upon marriage. Above all, the breakdown of families due to separation or death of a parent contributed to the high adoption rates in Singapore. Prospective adoptive parents of children from crisis-stricken families revealed that they were more inclined to undergo the legal process rather than by traditional methods. Even so, ignorance with regards to legal procedures for adoption as well as avenues in obtaining information on family planning was pervasive.⁷¹¹

⁷¹⁰ Djamour, *Malay Kinship and Marriage in Singapore*, pp. 92-100.

⁷¹¹ *The Singapore Free Press*, 1st June, 1951 and *Report of the Social Welfare Department, 1951* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. 9.

To alleviate the recurrence of high numbers of undeclared adoptions and other related problems, a bill was passed in 1952 to repeal the Adoption of Children Ordinance of 1939. The sole objective of the bill was to reform 'the law of adoption of children with the modern view that an adopted child should be place on an equal footing as a natural and lawful child, and also to remove the present restrictions contained in the Principal Ordinance on adoption.'⁷¹² The new Bill had three main clauses. First, earlier restrictions which permitted only British subjects to be adopted and only persons domiciled in the Colony to be legal adopters were removed. Instead, any person in the colony was allowed to adopt if he or she fulfils several of the criteria laid down in the Ordinance. Second, all adopted children were to be regarded as the lawful children of the adopter. The rights of the natural parents would dissolve immediately upon the handing over of the child to the adopters. This was in line with the Adoption Act of 1950 in the United Kingdom. Third, the date of birth and name of adopted children were to be registered into the Adopted Children Register.⁷¹³ The bill along with the legal procedures for child adoption was subsequently publicised in newspapers and other media.

The *Annual Report of the State of Singapore of 1953* stated that there was an exponential increase in the number of persons filing adoption appeals through formal procedures. Tripling the numbers two years earlier, the Civil District Court dealt with 186 cases of adoption in 1953. In the same way, the Singapore High Court handled sixty-seven petitions from prospective adoptive parents. This figure

⁷¹² *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 14th October, 1952* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1955), pp. B339-340.

⁷¹³ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore, 14th October, 1952*, pp. B339-340.

was in stark contrast to that in 1951 when only eleven petitions were filed.⁷¹⁴ Such was, however, a partial reflection of the social realities of the time. A majority among the Chinese, Muslim, Sikh and Hindu communities in Singapore were resistant to the new adoption legislation that had been put in place, citing the cost of legal fees and the unwillingness to wait for long periods to obtain rights to the desired children. Others were averse to the idea of a new Birth Certificate that had the word 'Adopted' stamped on it. In sum, the newly amended Adoption Ordinance did not have a significant effect in limiting customary practices of adoption that characterized the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. A key underlying reason for this failure was that informal adoption was not, by any means, declared illegal. No reports were found with regards to marriages with underage adopted children though it can be surmised that the practice was effectively curbed with the advent of the newly elected government led by the People's Action Party in 1959.⁷¹⁵

CONCLUSION – IN RESTROSPECT

In retrospect, British reformatory strategy in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots were focused upon the police force, education, marriage and child adoption policies. While the police force had undergone comprehensive changes, British efforts in recruiting the Chinese were, however, dampened by the latter's

⁷¹⁴ *Annual Report – State of Singapore: 1953* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1954), p. 123.

⁷¹⁵ Ahmad bin Mohammed Ibrahim, *Islamic Law in Malaya* (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, 1965), p. 240; Ong Kah-kok, "The Practice of Adoption within and as Between Different Communities in this Country, the Policy of the Government and the Extent and Effectiveness of its Intervention" (Unpublished Academic Exercise submitted to the Department of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1954), pp. 69-70 and Hoe Wye-nee, "Adoption and The Natural Mother" (Unpublished Academic Exercise submitted to the Department of Social Studies, University of Malaya, 1960).

refusal to partake in the policing of the colony. In the realm of education, the British did not achieve their intended objectives. They had to accede to the demands of Muslims in preserving Malay language education as opposed to an English-based one. The *madrasahs* were eventually provided with financial support and the same held true for the Muslim College, which the British hoped could affect changes in the texture of Islamic education in the colony and throughout Malaya. The prospects were much brighter in the realm of marriage policies. High rates of child marriages, easy divorce and uncontrolled polygyny among the Muslims were effectively reduced. The colonial state had also paved the way towards the establishment of the *Syariah* court. New ordinances were set in place to reduce the practise of marriages between under-age Christians with persons of other faiths. The British were, however, unable to affect significant changes upon the established practise of informal adoption within the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities, even after the introduction of a new bill. All in all, through the symbiosis of reform and the four other strategies discussed in the preceding chapters, it can be argued that the British had, in the years from 1950 to 1953, redeemed their tarnished image and position, while they mitigated the wide-ranging ramifications of the riots as well as anticipated similar outbreaks arising from racial and religious dissensions.

CONCLUSION

This thesis began by stressing the significance of the Maria Hertogh controversy in the history of modern Singapore. For the first time in more than a century of British colonial rule on the island, Malay-Muslims who were previously regarded as peaceful and loyal servants of the Crown had taken it upon themselves to commit serious acts of aggression against Europeans and Eurasians. The seeds of such rage had germinated from the British failure to address the influence of radical ideas, the effects of socio-economic marginalisation, press sensationalisation of the legal controversy and the ineffectiveness of the police force which shaped the Singapore Muslim community's attitudes towards the colonial regime. Compounded by circumstances that led to the shooting of two Malay men, the colony witnessed the outbreak of one of the bloodiest in a series of mass violence. Innocent lives were lost and large amounts of property fell in ruins. Although the riots were quelled within two days, the legitimacy of British rule was put into question.

With that in mind, I have sought to traverse beyond the uncovering of the contributing factors of the riots and how they were suppressed, and to explore instead the lesser known terrain of the various strategies which the British had employed in the riots' aftermath. As has been shown, resistance towards the British colonial administration remained intense upon the quelling of the riots, and was manifested in various forms within the colonized society and in Britain itself. Discord, tensions and anxieties characterised the interactions within and between colonial officials of the Empire. Even so, the British were quick to recognize the

challenges and predicaments that lay before them, and sought to amend their embedded weaknesses. It was the recognition of the need to reform, adapt and react swiftly to the crisis through a combination of proscriptions, surveillance, self-criticism, reconciliation and reforms that enabled the British to deal effectively with the changing conditions on the ground in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots.

Whilst *proscriptions* had the effect of keeping potential instigators of violence at bay, the British were able to anticipate and eventually deal with selected opposing elements through intense *surveillance*. By way of judicious *self-criticism*, the higher echelons of the colonial administration were shielded from public scrutiny, which would otherwise have had an adverse impact upon the legitimacy of British colonial rule. Through *reconciliation*, the British colonial administration regained the trust of its subjects and diplomatic partners. *Reforms* that were initiated addressed the weaknesses of various aspects of the administration of Singapore. Underlying these five strategies were the crucial roles played by selected officials and politicians in London and the outlying colonies, who provided guidance, insights and expertise arising from their experience as servants of the Empire. The British had also gained the support of various personalities and organizations, which aided in the process of recovery, conciliation as well as averting resistance in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. Certainly, without indigenous collaboration and mediation, the colonial regime could not have remained firmly ensconced in Singapore.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁶ See David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 301 and Ronald Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism: Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration", in Roger

In the light of the above argument, it may be useful then to consider the short-term and long-term effectiveness of British strategies in the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots. Viewed from a short-term perspective, I concur with Frank Furedi's assertion that the Britain was able to deal effectively with threats of disorder in her colonies during the post-war era or 'at the very least able to influence, and sometimes even shape, the political complexion of its opponents.'⁷¹⁷ Due partly to the short-term effectiveness of British strategies in the aftermath of the riots, Muslims in Singapore were diverted from resorting to violence, and instead pursued independence through constitutional means. The Singapore Police Force was transformed into a more efficient instrument of the state. Various legal measures were introduced by the colonial administration to minimize the recurrence of child marriages between Muslim and Christian minorities on the island. No other major outbreaks of violence were reported within the time frame of this study. Indeed, the British successfully redeemed their tarnished image and position, mitigated the wide-ranging ramifications of the riots and anticipated similar outbreaks arising from racial and religious tensions. Such findings reinforce the proposition advanced by Theda Skocpol that even 'after great loss of legitimacy has occurred, a state can remain stable - and certainly invulnerable to internal mass-based revolts - especially if its coercive organizations remain coherent and effective.'⁷¹⁸

Owen and Bob Sutcliffe (eds.), *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism* (London: Longman, 1972), p. 120.

⁷¹⁷ Frank Furedi, "Creating a Breathing Space: The Political Management of Colonial Emergencies", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies*, 21, 3, (1993), pp. 94-104. Furedi maintained a similar argument in his book, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism*, pp. 264-274.

⁷¹⁸ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 32.

Nonetheless, from the long-run point of view, Furedi's argument loses its validity. Though no religious or racial riots occurred in the remaining years of the colonial era in Singapore after the Maria Hertogh incident, from 1954 onwards Singapore remained plagued with incidents of mass violence. The Chinese Middle School students riots, the Hock Lee Bus riots and the anti-National Service riots which broke out in the mid-1950s, to name a few, reflected not only the increased activism among opponents of colonialism, but also the debility of British strategies in annihilating the sustained and violent opposition from communists, ultra-nationalists, fundamentalists, communalists and opportunists. Revisionist histories of the causes and the aftermath of each of these riots are long overdue. A possible explanation for the persistent occurrence of such riots was the failure on the part of the British and Labour Front governments in dispersing various ethnic enclaves in Singapore which, as seen during the Maria Hertogh riots, were hotbeds of radicalism.

Such a non-interventionist attitude towards reconfiguring the social geography of Singapore characterized the political strategy of the Peoples' Action Party (or PAP) upon its electoral triumph in 1959. Having faced with the unprecedented plot by two Malay/Muslim underground organizations known as *Sunting* (BLOSSOM) and *Angkatan Revolusi Tentara Islam Singapura* (ARTIS, Singapore Islamic Revolutionary League) to topple the Singapore Government and the subsequent eruption of riots between Malays and Chinese in 1964 which claimed thirty-six lives, the PAP was compelled to abandon their previous

stance.⁷¹⁹ From then on, quotas on the percentage of various ethnic groups residing in a given area were imposed by the Housing Development Board (HDB).⁷²⁰ Power bases were diffused and ethnic enclaves were transformed into multi-racial constituencies. Riots in Singapore were relegated to the past.

But that is not all. Deeply affected by the jury's decision to acquit four of his clients who were responsible for the murder of a Royal Air Force officer in the midst of the Maria Hertogh riots, upon his election as Prime Minister of Singapore in 1959, Lee Kuan Yew sought to abolish the British jury system for all cases except murder. Ten years later, following heated debates, particularly between Lee Kuan Yew and David Marshall (a renowned lawyer and ex-Chief Minister of Singapore), the Criminal Procedure Code Act 1969 was amended. The British jury system in Singapore was brought to an end.⁷²¹

More to the point, in the long run, the British policy of ensuring a slow progress towards independence for Malaya and Singapore was ironically lost in the hands of Malay activists and politicians, who seized upon the sensibilities of the masses. The years following the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots, as Joel Kahn rightly observed, marked 'the coming to maturity of modern Malay nationalism, the creation of a coherent narrative of the coming-to-nationhood of

⁷¹⁹ 'Special Branch Intelligence Summary for May 1960 (No.5/60)'; 'Special Branch Intelligence Summary for January 1961 (No.1/61)', FO 1091/107 and 'Activities of ARTIS (Angkatan Revolusi Tentara Islam Singapura - Singapore Islamic Revolutionary League)', CO 1030/1193.

⁷²⁰ Chua Beng Huat, *Political Legitimacy and Housing: Stakeholding in Singapore* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 142-145.

⁷²¹ Chan Wing Cheong and Andrew B.L. Phang, "The Development of Criminal Law and Criminal Justice", in Kevin Y.L. Tan (ed.), *Essays in Singapore Legal History* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005), p. 269.

the Malay peoples and its “implanting” in the broader popular consciousness...⁷²²

Although he was abhorred by the British when compared to Dato Onn, the aftermath of the Maria Hertogh riots witnessed the rise of Tengku Abdul Rahman, whose popularity peaked as he capitalized on the campaign to appeal for persons who were sentenced to death. The same was true for the Malay radicals whose imprisonment and proscriptions upon the quelling of mass violence had expanded their influence and mass support. Following their release, a select few had initiated a shift in political strategy and eventually become ardent supporters of UMNO to pursue their intended objective of accelerating the process of independence from within an influential party.⁷²³ Indeed, it was the rapid growth of popular support, strategic alliances and the progressive dismantling of Communist as well as other leftist strongholds that provided the Tengku with the necessary political leverage to accelerate the country’s progress towards independence. Merely seven years after the Maria Hertogh riots, and despite the initial plans of Whitehall officials, Malaya was no longer a part of the British Empire. Independence was declared in 1957 before the emergency ended and before Malaya had developed a multiracial political outlook.⁷²⁴

But the drama did not end there. The new Prime Minister of Malaya played an instrumental role in the movement to incorporate Singapore - one of the last among British colonies in Asia - as part of a new Malaysia in 1963. The merger experiment was, however, doomed from the onset. Dissensions between

⁷²² Joel S. Kahn, *Other Malays: Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in the Modern Malay World* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2006), p. 108.

⁷²³ Means, *Malaysian Politics*, p. 119.

⁷²⁴ Anthony J. Stockwell, “Imperialism and Nationalism in Southeast Asia”, in Judith M. Brown and Wm. Roger Louis (eds.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: The Twentieth Century, Volume IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 487 and Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 277.

politicians on both sides of the causeway developed and soon went far beyond the possibility of resolution. In spite of appeals by Sir Harold Wilson to exercise restraint, the Tengku decided upon the separation of Singapore from its peninsula hinterland. On 9th August 1965, a new nation, the Republic of Singapore was born.⁷²⁵

In hindsight, the Maria Hertogh controversy was momentous not only for those who had been traumatized throughout the ordeal, nor for the British who endeavoured to restore their image and agency. Rather, the three long years that succeeded the riots provided a powerful impetus towards a new destiny for the peoples of Singapore and Malaysia. It is more than timely, therefore, for historians to go beyond the study of the causes that led to mass violence in a given colonial context, and examine the strategies employed by colonial regimes in the aftermath, the resistance they encountered and the impact of these processes upon the local communities. Among several riots involving Muslims in the post World War Two era which could be re-examined, so as to refine or even challenge the validity of arguments brought forth by this thesis, are those that occurred in other British colonial territories such as Aden (in 1947), Somalia (in 1948), Mauritius (in 1955) and Bahrain (in 1956). Perhaps more could be learnt from such an extension of our study of the past; on ways to restore peace and rebuild societies torn asunder by mass violence.

⁷²⁵ Albert Lau, *A Moment of Anguish: Singapore in Malaysia and the Politics of Disengagement* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), pp. 263-265.

APPENDIX 1

STATEMENT BY MEMBERS OF THE INTER-RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION AND OTHER REPRESENTATIVES OF RELIGIOUS BODIES, 22ND FEBRUARY, 1951

The world today is an arena in which forces of good and evil are locked in deadly combat.

We summon men of goodwill to return to faithful obedience of God and His Law. In obedience to the Law of God is the only foundation of freedom and the only protection from slavery.

We summon men of goodwill to set men free from every force that enslaves them; from ignorance and falsehood, from want and exploitation, from persecution and oppression.

We repudiate and condemn mob violence and political terror.

We deeply deplore the recent sad happenings in Singapore, and express our profound sorrow and grief at the sufferings caused.

We offer our condolence to the relations and friends of those who were killed in those days and sympathise with those who were injured or sustained any loss.

We will henceforth do all in our power to promote understanding and reconciliation between those at variance.

We pledge ourselves and summon all people of goodwill to further the cause of men living in freedom and righteousness according to the Law of God; and to this end to advance and protect those natural and lawful associations in which men grow to freedom and justice – the family, the school, the occupational association or union, the nation, the religious community.

We pray God to awaken in the hearts of all men the spirit of Forgiveness and Love.

SIGNED BY:

Mohamed Abdul Aleem Siddiqui (Muslim) Ahmad bin Mohamed Ibrahim (Muslim)

Dato Syed Ahmad Alsagoff (Muslim) Syed Abdullah bin Yahya (Muslim)

M. Tahir Mahmood (Muslim) Syed Abubakar bin Taha Alsagoff
(Muslim)

Syed Ibrahim Alsagoff (Chairman, M.A.B.) Haji Ali bin Haji Said Salleh (Chief *Kathi*)

Ang Gim Tong (Buddhist)

Venerable Sek Hong Choon (Buddhist)

A.K. Isaac (Methodist)

Paul B. Means (Methodist)

Herbert H. Peterson (Methodist)

H.B. Amstutz (Methodist)

M. Bonamy (Vicar-General Catholic Church) Rev. I.J. Aloysius (Catholic)

Henry, Lord Bishop of Singapore (Anglican) R.K.S. Adams (Anglican)

Professor T.H. Silcock (Society of Friends) Rabbi Jacob Shababo (Jewish)

K.. Ramanathan (Theosophist)

Mehervan Singh (Sikh)

APPENDIX 2

EXCERPT FROM REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE APPOINTED TO EXAMINE AND REPORT ON THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE (AMENDMENT BILL), 1952

The reasons advanced by the Churches referred to above against the enactment of the Bill may be summarized as follows:-

1. The prevailing social custom in Singapore in respect of the age of marriage differ widely from English custom.
2. It would be imprudent for the Christian Churches to have to enforce a minimum age of marriage which is widely different from that sanctioned by the social custom of eastern peoples. If it is the social custom of a particular group of the population to permit marriage under the age of sixteen, the Christian Churches would be penalized by being put in a position where it appears to condemn those who contract such a marriage in spite of the fact that this social custom has had the support and sanction of centuries.
3. There has been no substantial change in social custom since the enactment of the principal Ordinance in 1940 which justifies any amendment in respect of the age of marriage.
4. The enactment of the Bill would produce a situation in which the minimum of marriage was different in the Federation of Malaya and the Colony. This would produce embarrassing relationships within families and would not enhance respect for the law.
5. The spirit of the English law is observed better by the existing Ordinance governing the age of marriage in Singapore which is the same for all irrespective of race or religion, than by the proposed Ordinance which would appear to discriminate in regard to one group of the population for no other reason than that they are Christians or profess the Christian religion.
6. The number of marriages celebrated under the provision of the Ordinance each year since the reoccupation does not support the view that the present legal minimum age encourages very early marriage nor that the Bill would substantially affect the average age of marriage.
7. The Bill would deprive the Churches of a pastoral discretion used hitherto for the benefit of a few young people.
8. It is doubtful whether the effective means of achieving a higher age of marriage is best found in legislation. It should follow a process of education rather than precede it.

We have a good reason to hope that the Christian Churches can be persuaded to revise their attitude to the Bill and to give the lead to the other religious groups and we therefore recommend that the principle of the Bill be accepted. Mr. P.F. de Souza however dissents from the Bill.⁷²⁶

⁷²⁶ *Proceedings of the Second Legislative Council, Colony of Singapore* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1952), p. C381.

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